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C-E

TO
S.L., G.P.D. AND W.B.T.
MY FELLOW TRAVELLERS



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THE VALLEY OF
CREEPING MEN



Chapter One

THE SCIENTIFIC MEETING

NED SHACKLETON, on a November morning in his London rooms in Old Burlington Street, had just finished writing several letters of importance. He took up Carl Schnitter's letter again and read it:

"DEAR MR. SHACKLETON:

"I had the stockade strengthened, as you ordered, and have added two more dugouts. Two elephants crashed down the trail last week in the night and smashed in a couple of the huts. We got one of them, and the men had a feast. I sold the tusks at Yoko for fourteen guineas.

"My advice is come soon. Mambu is getting ugly. There's bad blood between him and Kolak. If Mambu leaves, he is sure to take all the best men with him, and you might lose months before you could get another lot who would be willing to come up into this section.

"I enclose a list of things we need, in case you haven't thought of all of them.

"Yours respectfully,

CARL SCHNITTER."

Ned Shackleton did not need Schnitter's warning. He folded the letter, narrowed his eyes, and looked into the fire; yet not into the fire, exactly; into a jungle stockade, rather,

in Africa, where Mambu and Kolak might at that minute be quarrelling, and where Schnitter himself, never any too tactful, might be doing or saying something that would make the blacks restive, in that section which none of them knew well, which practically all of them mistrusted, and where their superstitious fears were, for the most part, on a hair trigger.

He must, of course, go soon, but also he must have the money to carry on his expedition. As to that, he had just returned from an unsuccessful visit to Cotterell, Janeway & Cotterell.

"I'm most interested in your expedition, Mr. Shackleton," old Mr. Jason Cotterell had said, eyeing him appreciatively. "I have great faith in the initiative that you Americans possess; I should say, with a physique like yours, you'd be capable of undergoing the hardships and standing the climate of the West Coast, and dealing single handed with the natives if you had to. But you see the words governing Mr. Masters' bequest, or foundation, or whatever you've a mind to call it, are quite exact. His money is to stay where it is until some male member of the family, no matter how remote—I believe you are only remotely connected—has so signally distinguished himself—'*so signally*' in any valuable or unique work—'*unique*' is the word—that he has become famous. Mr. Masters was, no doubt you know, slightly embittered by his son's failure to— Ah yes, I see, you know about that! Well, of course, it is very disappointing."

Then the old gentleman had offered him, in an eager and garrulous manner, his face beaming and his eyes bright, what he evidently looked upon as a wonderful suggestion. He had suggested that Shackleton go for aid to the great

Russian psychologist under whom Shackleton and his brother had once studied.

"You've put up an expensive expedition to find your hitherto undiscovered species of gorilla. Who knows? Dr. Marakoff may have found this very place you're looking for. And that famous ape of his that he experiments with, and keeps so secret, shut up, they say, in the third story of his house in Smith Square, may be the very kind you're looking for. Oh, I've heard ugly tales about that ape!" He put up an arresting hand as Ned Shackleton would have interrupted him, and sped on with his eager-eyed suggestion. "I've heard Marakoff gives the beast hypodermics to keep it quiet. I've heard it is no ordinary gorilla, but yellow like a collie; that it's very close to human, sometimes has a vile temper, and sometimes is disgustingly affectionate; and I've heard about the beautiful woman, too—Greek is she?—that Marakoff had with him in Africa. I've heard that she has as good control of the beast as Marakoff has.

"Mind you, I don't approve of any of these things, but I do say that they put your work and Dr. Marakoff's on somewhat the same footing. You're an anthropologist hoping to find a certain manlike gorilla. You're interested in studying their speech, I understand, or something like that. . . . Am I right? And Marakoff's a psychologist studying animal and human psychology, mental processes, hidden motives. . . . Very interesting, hidden motives . . . all the things that go on in the back of a man's mind that nobody but himself knows . . . Well, I'd say to him, 'Dr. Marakoff, you and I are interested along the same lines. But your work can't possibly hurt mine, nor mine yours.' I'd even ask him to let me see the ape. Of course, Marakoff's

fabulously wealthy. Take my advice. Go to Marakoff, get the money to finish your expedition; write your book; come back here famous, to Cotterell, Janeway & Cotterell, and I'll take the greatest pleasure in handing you the whole Masters bequest—a tidy sum, too! And after that you'll have enough money to carry on all the gorilla expeditions you've a mind to. See? Now you take my advice. Go to Marakoff."

And Shackleton had replied at last to the garrulous old gentleman: "Thank you very much, but I'm afraid I can't go to Dr. Marakoff. I wrote him two weeks ago, just about what you suggest. His answer was a flat refusal."

Ned Shackleton was thinking of this now. He glanced at the clock. Almost time for him to go to the Scientific Society's meeting. At that meeting, by a curious irony of fate—or might it perhaps be good fortune?—his own address on "The Search for Evolutional Proofs" stood next to Marakoff's on "The Relationship of Human and Brute Psychology," which was the last on the program. Under ordinary circumstances he would have remained to pay his respects to Marakoff, and perhaps to discuss with him the papers; but Marakoff's refusal still rankled in his mind. He was glad of a luncheon engagement which would make it necessary for him to leave immediately after the close of the meeting.

It was an hour later. Ned Shackleton's address before the members of the Scientific Society was drawing to a close. A young reporter who sat second from the aisle in the fifth row, watching him narrowly, thought, as he noted the accurate, strong, unswerving blows of Shackleton's argu-

ments and conclusions: "That's a young man more than halfway there. And he's made of iron."

The reporter's eyes moved down the row of notables seated on the platform behind the speaker, and came to rest on one who sat at the extreme left. Dr. Sergius Marakoff, reputed the greatest psychologist in Europe, was no new figure to London audiences. He had stood before them often since the fall of the old RÉGIME in Russia had led him to take up residence in England. But for two years he had been notoriously silent; engrossed, it was rumoured, in his experiments with the yellow ape. Today the audience awaited his speech eagerly. It was expected to be in the nature of a revelation.

He sat now absorbed in thought. Presently the reporter saw him draw a notebook and pencil from his pocket, tear a leaf from the notebook, write something on it, and, beckoning to an attendant, give it to him with whispered instructions. A moment later the attendant made his way to a young man who occupied the aisle seat next but one to the reporter, and held out the folded slip of paper. On it could be read, in Marakoff's bold, dramatic handwriting, "*James Shackleton.*"

The reporter regarded his neighbour with interest. He remembered to have heard that there were two Shackleton brothers. But this one had not the masterful, powerful physique of the explorer-scientist. A sensitive-faced chap, with long, delicate fingers that trembled noticeably as he took the note, unfolded it, read its brief message, and slipped it into his pocket.

While the reporter was speculating as to what the great Marakoff might have to say to Edward Shackleton's brother,

Edward Shackleton closed his address, which was received with enthusiasm by the audience.

A moment later Marakoff rose and advanced to the front of the stage. A long burst of applause greeted him. He stood without acknowledging it, waiting for it to die down.

Sergius Marakoff was tall and dark; yet perhaps the darkness did not lie so much in his eyes, which were a deep steel colour, nor in the heavy black hair slightly lightened by grey, as in the mood of the man; in some impression of secret power, not easy to define, and in a certain sinister and alert assurance characteristic of those who seem always to have, as it were, an unsheathed sword in their hands.

Here and there people in the audience shifted with satisfaction in their chairs. It was generally supposed Marakoff would tell of his experiments with his mysterious ape.

But Marakoff, on his part, was not thinking of the ape. He was thinking, with a kind of whimsical, sinister speculation, as he looked out over the audience, that if the uncanny warning that had come to him the day before had any validity, and if his anxious old housekeeper, Olga Bendovna, was right, this might very well be the last audience he would ever address. Then he put these thoughts resolutely from him, drew the little table which held his notes a trifle nearer, and began.

Marakoff spoke for a while quietly, almost technically, of his subject; then his address gathered strength. He began heaping up his proofs, prophesying as to possibilities, pointing out the changes that would take place in men's behaviours and in human society when the study of psychology was more advanced; when men's hidden motives were better known and understood.

"Hidden human motives!" he paused. "How little we know about them, we who go so closely masked! How little we fathom them, we who are forever trying to hide from one another our own secret motives; often enough, too, hiding them even from our very selves! Here lies the key to all crime, if we could but fit it in the lock. What need would we have of jails and Scotland Yard if we could read infallibly in all the little, seemingly unrelated things that the criminal says and does, long before the day of his crime, the hidden motives, the hidden fear, or greed, or envy, that will some day precipitate the crime.

"Freud has studied these hidden motives, but Freud has not gone deep enough. He has analysed only human psychology. But under human psychology lie the countless ages of brute psychology in which human psychology is founded. Until this is more deeply understood, the mind of man will remain what it is today, an unexplored jungle of hidden hates and fears, secret ambitions and unacknowledged creeping purposes, in which human passions move stealthily and under cover, like beasts in the jungle.

"You can picture the revolution there will be when these things are better understood. The man who lies and the man he deceives; the robber and the man he robs; the murderer and the man he plots to murder—will be known to one another. The man who plots crime will be known to be plotting. We shall know then the motives that lie deep behind the thoughts of those into whose faces we look. . . ."

He paused, and his eye roved speculatively among the faces before him. "As I look into yours." The audience waited. Would he speak definitely now about his experiments

with the gorilla? But instead, he brought his address to an almost abrupt close.

"My further experiments in the relations of human and animal psychology form the basis of my forthcoming book. My notes for that book are almost completed. When the book is ready, you will find in it a full account of my experiments with the gorilla."

At the end of the meeting, Marakoff, who had a genius for getting rid of people, rid himself quickly of those who grouped themselves about him, by stretching a cordial hand to the sensitive-faced young man who hovered on the edge of the group.

"Ah, James Shackleton! There you are! You got my note? I was afraid you might slip away without my seeing you. Will you lunch with me?"

The two men went at once across the lounge, into the club dining-room, and to a table by one of the windows that gave on Whitehall.

When the waiter had taken their order, Marakoff leaned his arms on the table.

"Well, how have you been? I understand you've made a success of your work at the Museum."

"Yes," James Shackleton smiled in a little wry fashion. "As far as it goes. The directors like it."

"I don't doubt it. It is just a person like you, well trained and sensitive, who could plan and direct work like that."

"I've just finished a model," James said, "a plan for the mounting of several sets of wild animals; two glorious old bull elephants, one of them attacked by a panther."

And all the while that he spoke, his eager face lighted up, he was wondering why Marakoff had sent him the note ask-

ing to see him, and at this particular time. Why had he not sent for him before if it had been a mere matter of renewing an old acquaintance? What was Marakoff's motive? Could it be that Marakoff would perhaps let him help him with his work? When he and his brother had studied under Marakoff in former years, he had enjoyed a good deal of the great man's favour. Now, since his health forbade his undertaking such difficult expeditions as his brother was engaged in, was it possible that his future might in some way be linked with that of Marakoff? Marakoff had always liked him.

Marakoff swung his glance away an instant, and then back again sharply.

"I was interested in your brother's paper. I did not realize until today how much he had accomplished, nor how far he had gone. You don't happen to know how far he has gone up the Sanaga River? Has he gone beyond Yoko?"

"Oh yes, some distance, I believe."

"To the southwest?"

"I'm not sure. The country there is practically virgin, you know; jungle along the streams, then mountains."

Marakoff blew a smoke ring and watched it, then brought his glance down like a plumb line on James Shackleton.

"Do you happen to have heard him mention a valley?"

"Well, there must be valleys, of course. He spoke of one beyond where his stockade is now; shut off by a cataract, I believe."

Marakoff kept his glance on the young man's eyes as though he were trying to fathom how much James Shackleton knew.

"Do you know," he said at last, "whether your brother has any engagement for tonight? Where is he now?"

"He is lunching at the Savoy, I believe, with friends of his."

"Would you be good enough to telephone him for me? I should like to have him come to see me this evening." He rose abruptly and looked at his watch. "I must be going."

As they left the dining-room a club attendant in sober mulberry livery approached them.

"Dr. Marakoff?"

"What is it?" Marakoff's tone was impatient.

"A telephone message, sir." The servant coughed discreetly. "It's a lady, sir. She wouldn't give me her name. Said I was to tell you it was 'the goddess,' sir, and something important. She said you'd understand."

"Good-bye, sir," James Shackleton held out his hand. "Thank you for seeing me."

"You won't forget?" said Marakoff. "About your brother."

"No, I'll telephone him."

An hour later, while Marakoff was fitting his key into the door of his house in Smith Square, the knob turned in his hand and the door opened, and Olga Bendovna's voice greeted him: "Oh, by the mercy of God! Then you're back!"

Olga Bendovna with Kanaka, Marakoff's Bantu body servant, and an old Danish cook, constituted Marakoff's household.

Olga Bendovna was neither old nor young, but she had lived many years. There were years stowed away in her strong, stocky figure; years sunk in the smouldering trouble

and eagerness of her eyes; years packed away in the suppressed anxiety and over-eager gestures of her large, smooth hands; years in the way she often had of stopping short in what she was saying or doing to raise her head and listen; years, too in the questionless silence with which she lived in the sinister house of Marakoff, waiting upon his coming or going, never intruding, serving him with obedience and concern, and without comment.

But now something had occurred to break Olga Bendovna's silent attendance on her master.

"I thought," she said, and though she was not a religious woman, she crossed herself—"I thought never to see you again."

Marakoff's displeasure showed in the severe dark lines of his face. As she took his coat from him and hung it up, anxiously, his glance went to the hall table. "What have you done with the little god?" he said.

Her hands fluttered into an eagerly anxious gesture.

"Do not ask me! I have hidden it."

"Olga Bendovna," Marakoff said, severely, "go and get the little god, and bring it to me in my study."

If Marakoff had commanded her to go and fetch the devil by the hand, Olga Bendovna would have done it. When she came to his library, a few moments later, her face was chalk white.

"Put it there on the table."

She obeyed him, her very lips white.

"Now sit down there, on the other side of the table."

She did so, like some one in a trance, but with a look of pain and horror in her face.

"Now fold your hands."

She folded them.

"Now look at the little god."

Her eyes wavered, then fixed themselves on the little black figure that stood on the table between her master and herself—a hideous little, fat-bellied, thick-lipped figure of ebony, an African idol or fetish of a crude type.

Marakoff got up and went to her, and with a deft gesture of his long delicate fingers pressed the lids down over her staring eyes, held them so a moment, and said in a rather loud voice:

"Now you have forgotten everything else, Olga Bendovna. Tell me about the night in Moscow."

Immediately, as though in a dream, she began speaking, almost chanting:

"Snow! Snow! Everywhere snow! On all the housetops, and on the domes of the churches."

Marakoff had taken his seat again. With his elbows on the arms of his chair, the tips of his fingers pressed together, his eyes were fixed on the woman opposite him.

"Snow! Snow!" she continued to chant.

"Yes," he said, softly, lowering his lips to his finger tips, "there was snow. Then what?"

"Then the gypsy woman came into the room," the colourless voice chanted, "and there was snow on her shawl. And when you gave her the money to bring you luck, she threw it back at you, and she said, 'Your money is evil!'"

She paused, and her eyelids fluttered, then she went on:

"The gypsy said, 'You have dared to make yourself greater than God; but beware, Sergius Marakoff, some day a little black god will come to you—black and small—and when the little black god comes, then say your prayers,

Sergius Marakoff, say your prayers! Your life will be near its sudden end.' ”

Marakoff remained a moment silent in the perfect stillness of the room, then he said, “Olga Bendovna, you have been faithful to me; you will be faithful to me always. If any harm comes to me you will do as I now direct you. If I die, the ape must die.”

He reached, carefully not taking his eyes from her, and put his hand in the drawer of his table.

“There is here a little metal box. It has something in it that you will give the ape. The key is here beside it. You will go to the third story and open the door. You will empty what is in the box on the floor and close the door.” He paused and repeated slowly, “You will do this if anything happens to me.”

For a moment she seemed to emerge slightly from his spell. Her hands fluttered.

“Not that, master. Not that!”

Marakoff leaned and covered her hands with his own, and intensifying his gaze he said compellingly, “Yes, that.” Then he rose and said in a casual tone; “You are no longer in Russia. You are in my house in London.”

Olga Bendovna opened her eyes.

Marakoff spoke now in a casual tone: “I am expecting several people to come to see me tonight. There will be a Mr. Shackleton ——”

Olga Bendovna looked at him suddenly, imploringly.

“Not tonight, master. I will not open the door for anyone tonight. Kanaka has gone.”

Marakoff turned his glance on her sharply.

“Where has Kanaka gone?”

"He was afraid to stay in the house, master, with the little god. He won't come back. He wiped his footprints from the steps as he went. Oh, master, keep all the doors closed!" She cast her eyes upward, "Oh, that you should ever have brought that evil animal to live in the third story of this house with us. Kanaka thinks you bewitched him, else he never would have dared care for it."

"Go to your room directly after supper," Marakoff said, and there was a light as of swift, angry lightning in his eyes. "I will open the door myself."

As she left the room, Olga Bendovna saw Marakoff take up the little god and make a better place for it on the table among his papers.

When his housekeeper was gone, Marakoff took up the little figure and examined it carefully. He stood looking at it for a long while. Finally, with one finger, he traced thoughtfully a sign that evidently had been newly cut in the base of the figure:





Chapter Two

AT THE SAVOY

THE usual one-o'clock luncheon crowd thronged the lounge of the Savoy. On a sofa near the window which overlooks the Embankment a young man and a girl sat side by side and in silence. The young man's gaze was fixed moodily on the river. His rather heavy eyelids drooped over his blue eyes. One hand plucked nervously at his little blond moustache.

The girl leaned forward and laid a quick, reminding hand on his sleeve.

Her brother's gaze swung round to her. "Sorry. I was thinking, Jo-John."

"So I see," Joan Merrington retorted. "It's a disgusting habit you've got into lately, Frank darling. You didn't use to, you know."

"Perhaps I didn't have to."

"Well, anyway, I don't like it." Her voice was imperious. "Here I come rushing up to town in response to your wire to lunch with you and Ned Shackleton. And you sit as glum as an oyster and Ned is late!"

Frank smiled his sudden, endearing smile.

"Poor Jo-John!"

Then, as though the words quickened some other and bitter memory, he said with altered emphasis: "*Poor* Jo-John!"

Joan's cheek flushed. After a brief pause she said, quietly: "What is it, money again?"

"Money? Of course it's money!" he flung back at her. "It's always that, or the want of it."

A troubled frown appeared between Joan's level brows.

"I almost wish Ned Shackleton had stayed in Africa," she said. "For the last fortnight you've done nothing but talk of going back with him."

"It wasn't Ned Shackleton who set me thinking about Africa," Frank said. "I've always wanted to go there."

"You always want to go somewhere. It used to be Ceylon. Then it was Tahiti, pearl-fishing. And now, Africa. You've had so many schemes, you know."

"That isn't like you, Jo-John." His voice sounded hurt. "Dobby's been talking to you."

She did not reply. He added with increasing bitterness: "I had another go at him this morning. But it's no use. Not a penny more than my allowance, which he considers 'quite liberal.' Trust Dobby for that. He won't give me the money, and he strongly advises you against doing so."

Joan said, quietly: "I have helped you, you know, several times."

"Yes, I know. You've been a brick, Jo-John. If only you'd see your way to doing it again. Just this once. Five thousand pounds would do it. I'd pay it back— I've told you about the formula I have . . . and if I can only find the stuff . . . Good Lord! If you knew the possibilities ——"

"No, Frank. There isn't the slightest use your asking me. The last time, after all those racing debts, I told you that I wouldn't pay up for you again. If you would tell Dobby what you want to go with Ned Shackleton for, and why —— If he could be sure this African scheme was a sound venture, he'd probably make you an advance."

Her brother sprang to his feet and stood looking down at her. Swift, unreasoning anger darkened his face.

"I think, on the contrary, I've been pretty definite," he stormed. "I've told you there is a valley in West Africa that I want to get into. Ned Shackleton is headed for the same place. It's the chance of a lifetime for us to combine forces and go together. And that's all I will tell. What I believe may lie in that valley, and what that means to me, is my secret."

Joan lifted her hand and let it fall again in her lap as though to dismiss the subject.

"In that case ——"

Frank made no reply. He was signalling to Ned Shackleton, who stood at the top of the short flight of steps, while his eyes searched the crowd in the lounge. When he caught sight of the pair by the window he came quickly toward them. Frank's welcome reached out across several feet of space.

"What luck?"

"The usual." Shackleton's tone was ironic. He took Joan's hand with slight formality. "I'm sorry to have kept you waiting."

Their eyes, like their hands, clung together for the fraction of a moment.

In the restaurant they found a table by a window at the edge of the crowd. Once seated, Frank leaned forward impatiently toward Shackleton.

"What did Cotterell say?"

"He advised me to go to Marakoff."

"Marakoff?" Frank laughed.

Joan paused in the act of drawing off her gloves. "Marakoff?" she said. "The yellow-ape man?"

"Yes, the one and only Marakoff," Frank replied. "Power like the devil; money to burn; could finance a dozen expeditions if he wanted to. And a rotter if there ever was one."

"What makes him a rotter?" Joan demanded.

Her brother raised the hand that held his cigarette. "I know all about Marakoff," he said. "It isn't a pretty story."

A waiter stood respectful, expectant.

"Let us get this off our minds first," said Joan, bending over the menu.

When they had finished giving their orders, Frank Merington leaned forward, flicking the ash from his cigarette. With his eyes on Shackleton he said, pointedly, "But you'll go just the same, won't you?"

Ned Shackleton's face hardened.

"Yes," he said quietly, "I shall go. Nothing can prevent that."

"And the money? How are you going to get it?" Frank broke off abruptly. A waiter stood at his elbow, holding out a tray on which lay a small folded piece of paper. Frank took the paper absently, fumbling in his pocket for a coin for the man. When he opened it his face lighted suddenly. He stood up.

"Excuse me," he said. "There is some one here that I must speak to. Don't wait for me. I'll be back in a few minutes." He threaded his way through the crowded room.

His going threw a slight constraint on the two who were left.

"Frank is terribly keen about going out to Africa with you," Joan said, quickly, as though to fill up the gap his going had created.

"I know. I wish he could go."

She leaned to him across the narrow table space. "He's so queer and secretive about the whole scheme," she said. "He won't tell us ——"

"About the Valley?"

She nodded,

Ned Shackleton looked away from her out of the window through narrowed eyes. Then he swung his glance back to her.

"It's the dream of his life," he said. His voice, usually so restrained and noncommittal, had become suddenly vibrant with emotion. "I may say it is my dream, too, to find that valley. I am so near to it. The work has gone so far that to be balked now ——" He checked himself sharply. "Are you really interested?" he added.

"Yes. Tremendously."

There could be no doubting her sincerity. Always there had been something about Joan Merrington that was like a gallant and fearless boy. Now, to Shackleton there seemed added to that a new brightness and keenness. She was as challenging as a sword.

"Well then," he began, slowly, his eyes holding hers, "at a point near the West Coast of Africa there lies a valley; no white man has ever gone into it. The natives have a great dread of it. It lies far up a sluggish, tropical river—the Sana-ga. The river is impassable to big canoes except after the rains. The mountains of the Kamerons hem it in on both sides. The entrance to it lies through a narrow defile. Even this is cut off by a giant cataract. What lies behind that wall of water no one knows, except—perhaps—Marakoff. I feel pretty sure he's been there."

His voice dropped suddenly hard. "I mean to find out what lies behind that wall of water."

"Then you believe that you will find the kind of ape you are looking for in that valley?" Joan asked.

"I am convinced of it. Remember, I've spent two years in West Africa, running down legends and hunters' tales, re-convincing myself that what anthropologists have sighed after for years actually exists—an ape more manlike than any heretofore discovered; an ape with the faculties of speech well developed; an ape which has developed a language of its own, something parallel to human speech, perhaps.

"The Evilis have a legend that in that valley live the spirits of evil, powerful men, who have been turned into apes. One old chief on the Ogowe told me it was the belief of his tribe that those apes could be beasts or men at will."

Joan's lips were parted eagerly, her eyes shone. "How wonderful!" she said.

"All native superstition, of course," Shackleton went on. "Still, you see the conclusion to be drawn. The country lies like this."

He took a pencil from his pocket and made as though to sketch a rough diagram on the tablecloth. Then, frowning, he leaned over and picked up the note which Frank had left beside his plate.

"You know how Africa swings in here below the Gold Coast?" His pencil traced a quick outline on the back of it. "Right in here, between the Kameroons and the Congo, is the only place in the world where gorillas are found. Du Chaillu went there, but not far enough. Marakoff has gone farther. I mean to go farther still. The country lies like this; here is Douala on the coast at the mouth of the Sanaga. Three days up-stream is Yoko. Up above that, where the

river forks"—he made a small cross on the map he had drawn—"I have my stockade. Beyond that, about here, is the hut where Marakoff lived. Beyond lies the entrance to the Valley."

"You haven't told me its name," Joan said.

"The natives have such a dread of it that they never speak its name," Shackleton replied. "They won't even go into that section. Instead of the name, they use a sign, and this sign is in itself a dread thing—a death threat. If they want an enemy to die, or if they intend to kill him, they lay the sign at his door or upon something that belongs to him. You can see by all this what the Valley means to the natives. To them, it means certain death. If you and I, for instance, were going into that valley, we would say, quite simply, 'I am going into a certain valley,' but an African of that section would simply make the sign in twigs or scratch it in the mud, and that sign would say, 'I am going to death.'"

Joan leaned toward him, fascinated, "Show me."

His pencil sketched several related lines on the map he had drawn. "Here it is:"



Joan put out her hand for the map. She bent over it, studying it intently. "May I keep this? I'd like to."

Her eyes, lifted in interrogation, dropped suddenly before the unveiled desire in his. He nodded without speaking. She folded the little map and slipped it into her purse.

At that moment Frank came toward them down the narrow aisle between the tables. There was a woman with him.

She was, Joan saw, extraordinarily beautiful. Heads turned to gaze at her as she passed. She seemed not of the British world at all, but of a world infinitely older, and more subtle and experienced. It would be difficult to say just what it was that gave one this impression. One read it in the unusually pure oval of her face and in the long, enigmatic eyes, yellow under dark lashes; a little, too, perhaps in her air of exquisite detachment, tinged with the delicate melancholy that comes of knowing one's world too well. Joan watched her with unfeigned interest as, without pausing and without a word of farewell, she left Frank and went on alone out of the restaurant.

He joined Shackleton and Joan at once. All his former moodiness had vanished. He put a hand on Ned's shoulder, almost patronizingly.

"Don't let's worry about the money," he said. "You'll see, something will turn up. It always does." He beckoned the waiter and ordered a bottle of Veuve Cliquot.

Sparkling amber bubbled in the glasses. Frank lifted his. "To the gods of Africa!" he said. "And to our success!"

A moment later Ned Shackleton was called to the telephone. As he followed the boy out into the lounge, Joan said, quickly, to Frank: "What makes you so sure about the money, and everything?"

Her brother's eyes smiled at her mockingly over the rim of his glass. He did not reply.

Ned Shackleton came back almost at once.

"Marakoff's changed his mind," he said, in a voice that he tried to make casual. "He wants to see me. My brother just telephoned me."

"Your brother?" Frank looked a trifle bewildered.

"Yes. He has been lunching with Marakoff. I'm to go to Marakoff's house tonight at eleven."

"What do you suppose made him change his mind and want to see you?" Frank said. "Your speech?"

"Perhaps," Shackleton was thinking that he had not played his cards badly. Not until Marakoff had refused him had he decided to tell in his address so much about his expedition. He had no doubt that it was his mention of the Sanaga and the superstitions of the Evilis which had caught Marakoff's interest.

When the three young people came out into the lounge it was almost deserted. But on a sofa near the door of the restaurant sat the beautiful woman with the yellow eyes. As the three approached, Ned Shackleton a little behind the others, she rose and came a step toward him.

"Mr. Shackleton? May I have a word with you?"

Joan said to him quickly, a trifle overbrightly: "Good-bye. You won't forget? You are dining with us at Cranbrook tomorrow, you know."

"I shall not forget." He bowed over her hand. She turned in time to see Frank give the beautiful woman a little, gay, intimate salute.

"Who is she?" Joan asked as they passed out of earshot.

"Don't ask questions, Jo-John." He caught her arm and hurried her away.

She had an errand which took her to her bank. Frank put her into a taxi at the Savoy door, then he opened the door again and thrust in his head: "When you get home, you might send Bimbi in town with some clean shirts," he advised her. "Tell him to take the five-thirty and bring the things to me at the club. I'll send him back in the morning."

"Right-o," Joan nodded. "When will you be down?"

"Oh, tomorrow afternoon when Ned comes. Bye, John." He slammed the door.

She caught the four-o'clock from Charing Cross. As the train moved out of the dingy purlieus of London into the fresh countryside, Joan got out the little map Ned Shackleton had drawn for her, and studied it again. Her eyes followed the narrow thread of river he had called the Sanaga, leading up from the coast into those unexplored valleys of the Kamerouns. Here, at the tiny cross, was his stockade; beyond, in a country yet uncharted, lay that mysterious and awful Valley on which his hopes were centred.

She turned the paper idly, and her eye was caught by a message which had been written on the reverse side. She read it through, unthinkingly at first:—

"Darling ——

Can you come to me? The question of the money is virtually settled."

It was signed, in an upward slanting, foreign way, *Dornia Eleutherios*.

Her eyes went over it again, while the events of the past few hours marshalled themselves into order in her brain. This was the note which had been brought to Frank as they sat at lunch. It was his summons from the beautiful woman with the yellow eyes, the woman who, a little later, had stopped Ned Shackleton in the Savoy lounge—Dornia Eleutherios.

Joan's upper lip tightened in an ironic little smile. Then she folded the map, and with quick disdainful fingers tore

it into halves, the halves into quarters, the quarters into infinitesimal particles. She fluttered them from the window onto the rails.

Lord Sleugh, coming down to dinner that evening at Cranbrook House at exactly five minutes before the appointed hour, as was his invariable custom, found Joan already dressed and waiting for him in the hall.

The Earl of Sleugh was one of those noncommittal, spare, grey men—grey of hair, of face, and of manner—which England forges unto herself. Certain suave, bearded gentlemen of the Quai d'Orsay and the Quirinal Hill hated the Earl of Sleugh with a silent, unremitting hatred. It was said Lenin had kept a newspaper photograph of him in his desk drawer which he took out at intervals and cursed with the damning conclusiveness of Muscovite oaths. No party owned him; few men called him friend. If the man had any existence away from his office, the House, and the solemn precincts of the Athenæum, it was shrouded in mystery. He was, in addition to his state duties, Joan and Frank Merrington's trustee, and guardian of the younger Derek. Sir Hugh Merrington had been his first cousin.

Joan went up to him and linked her arm through his. "Bit of luck your coming down tonight, Dobby."

"I had to see Wilkins about those cottages. Where is Frank?"

"Staying in town for something. He'll be down tomorrow."

She drew him over to the fireplace, rested one slender silver-shod foot on the fender.

"You know everybody in London, Dobby. Tell me something—who is Dornia Eleutherios?"

A curtain seemed to drop over Lord Sleugh's eyes.

"Why do you ask me that?" he said.

Joan shrugged noncommittally. "I just wondered. That's all." She laughed a little mocking laugh. "Then you do know her?"

"Yes, I know her."

"And she is ——"

"Dornia Eleutherios," Lord Sleugh replied, "is—Mara-koff's mistress."



Chapter Three

THE SHOP IN TWILIGHT STREET

WHEN Ned Shackleton left the Savoy he turned down toward the City.

The smoky haze of London had already clouded the short November afternoon to dusk. As he contrasted the London greyness with the rich tropical world that awaited him, he felt alien and estranged. In Africa, now, the sun would be blazing on fantastically brilliant colours. Or when the quick night had come, there would be the moon, yellow and ripe, hanging like a melon in the liana-hung tangle of the forest. Africa was in his senses, in his heart.

Near Temple Bar, he turned sharply down one of the narrow side streets running to the Embankment and the docks of Holborn.

It was a district of ship chandlers. Anchors and oars and heaps of tangled seines stood about the doors. Through the shop windows one had glimpses of a jumble of exotic things brought by sailors from far countries: elephant tusks of yellowed ivory richly carved; a shining bronze Buddha; coral charms against the evil eye; a Chinaman's pigtail in a glass case—all these tumbled together with boat hooks and bits of clumsy wooden tackle, with knives and jew's-harps and tiny mirrors and large, printed red and blue calico handkerchiefs.

He paused before one of the shops and looked at the things in its windows. This was the window in which, three

days before, had stood the little thick-lipped, fat-bellied fetish god, carved of ebony. It was not there now.

He passed on to his destination, No. 41 A, two doors beyond. It was not a shop, but a low-browed doorway that gave on a mean and evil-smelling hall, from which a flight of rickety steps led to dim regions above. Ned Shackleton went quickly up the stairs. At the head of the first short flight he rapped sharply on a second door that had the painted superscription:

CALEB LIPSEY

SPICES, ESSENCES

AND

ESSENTIAL OILS

Caleb Lipsey, in a flapping coat of black alpaca, and a black skull cap covering his baldness, was like a lean and anxious raven. He shuffled forward out of the dimness of the shop, peering up at his visitor through near-sighted, spectacled eyes.

"Mr. Shackleton? Dear me, yes. It *is* Mr. Shackleton."

"Yes, and I've brought the present I said I had for you."

Ned Shackleton took from his pocket a tiny packet wrapped in oiled silk, and put this into Caleb Lipsey's hands.

Caleb Lipsey opened it with careful fingers. Within the wrappings was a twist of dried leaves. Within the leaves, folded snugly, a handful of small, dark berries.

"They're the berries of the *Rhus andronax*," Ned Shackleton explained. "They're a peculiarly deadly poison which acts immediately. Travellers, who know the jungle and its dangers, usually carry a few in their pockets to save themselves a possible worse death. The 'Key to the Jungle' the old traders call them."

Caleb Lipsey turned the withered black berries in the hollow of his dry palm. With his thumb and forefinger he took one up and smelled of it.

"The last resort, eh!" he said. "I'm proud to have them, Mr. Shackleton. I shall prize them. Dear me, yes—prize them very highly. I'm a bit interested in Africans myself. We have quite a few in this quarter."

"Yes, I know you have," said Ned Shackleton. "I noticed some African things in your neighbour's shop window."

"That would be Carstensen, sir."

"Carstensen? The man's a Dane?"

"As much that as anything, sir. He's been a seafaring man. Used to sail as mate of a tramp on the West African trade. He's got a black wife lives there with him. . . . She's a strange female, Mr. Shackleton. Scarce anybody ever sees her unless it's me, watching here from my window." He moved across to a small window. It gave on the yard behind the shops on Twilight Street.

"He keeps her in those rooms over the shop. There's times I've wondered what goes on over there. Strange doings, I don't doubt, sir. That woman's no ordinary nigger. And though she may not mix much with other folks, there's plenty come to see her. . . . Her own kind, of course. The saying goes hereabouts that she is a sort of voodoo woman, fortune-telling and all that." He laughed a dry, hard little chuckle. "And once, very late in the night it was, sir, something woke me out of a sound sleep and made me get up and look out. There she was on the roof of the addition back of the shop, dancing, sir. A great, fat, black woman." He dropped his voice to a whisper and leaned toward Ned Shackleton. "Stark naked she was, Mr. Shackleton, if you'll

believe me. Leaping and dancing there all alone by herself in the moonlight."

"All the West African natives do that," Shackleton said, casually. "The moonlight seems to set them mad." He returned sharply to the object of his visit.

"And now, Mr. Lipsey, about my order. Is it ready?"

"Ready these two days, sir."

Caleb Lipsey folded his flapping coat about him and shuffled to a corner. From a tiny wall cupboard he brought a small, paper-wrapped parcel.

"I made it at once. And with the care you asked me to take. Something harmless for the beast that will put it to sleep for a matter of a few hours. Something tasteless that you can slip into a fruit—say a banana—and the creature will never know. Something to take effect immediately. And there you are." He handed Shackleton a small square box. "You'll have your beast without killing, and with no harm done to him, either. Am I right, sir?"

"Quite right." Ned Shackleton slipped the box into his pocket.

"How long will the effect of the drug last?"

"A matter of about five hours, I'd say, sir, if the beast gets the full dose. Of course, everything depends on that. I've put the directions on the box lid."

"Good! I knew I could rely on you, Mr. Lipsey."

Caleb Lipsey beamed behind his spectacles.

"It's a wonderful idea, sir, to catch gorillas that way."

Ned Shackleton held out his hand. "I must be off," he said.

"Good-bye." Caleb Lipsey shook hands ceremoniously, then opened the door for him. "Mind the step."

At the corner of the Embankment, Shackleton hailed a passing taxi, and was driven to his rooms in Old Burlington Street. His whole mind now was on his appointment with Marakoff that evening.

Arrived in Old Burlington Street, he dismissed the taxi and ran quickly upstairs. He stopped at his brother James's door on the floor below his own, and rapped sharply. But there was no answer to his knock. Apparently James had not yet returned from his work at the Museum. He mounted the second flight and let himself into his own rooms.

He was in the midst of shaving when the telephone bell rang sharply. He took down the receiver. It was Frank Merriington's voice that came over the wire:

"I say, how about coming along with me tonight? I'm dining with a lady."

"A lady?"

"Perhaps I ought to say 'the lady.' If you've nothing better on, why not join us at Claridge's?"

Ned Shackleton made a hasty calculation.

"If you'll make it early."

"As early as you like."

"Good enough. At seven?"

"Right-o, seven sharp."

Later that evening Ned Shackleton stood before Marakoff's door. The house in Smith Square was quite dark except for a light on the first floor. He looked up at the closely shuttered third story. That was where Marakoff kept the ape. He paused, his hand on the bell. For a moment he had a swift sense of dread. Once or twice before in his life he had just missed some vital opportunity. Would anything

stand now between him and all that this interview might mean to him? He looked about over his shoulder. Smith Square was quiet and deserted. Then with sudden resolve he pulled the old-fashioned bell handle. The sound of the bell ringing within the house came sharp but clear, and with a little note of alarm or protest, as though the house resented his entrance.

Almost immediately the door was opened by Marakoff himself.

“Ah! You have come.”

Ned Shackleton entered, and Marakoff closed the door behind them.



Chapter Four

IN SERGIUS MARAKOFF'S STUDY

OLGA BENDOVNA waked early after a night of troubled dreams. There was a November fog in the square of the window. She could hear the steady drip from the eaves. Half waking, half dozing, she remembered in the old Russian days a butler who had cut himself on the arm, and while the cook ran to get her master, Olga had pushed a tin tray under his arm, and the blood had dripped like that; just like that . . . drip—drip.

What a fool you are, Olga Bendovna, to think of such things! Not so much a fool, either!

Bits of the previous evening came swimming back into her consciousness.

Her master had told her to go to her room. She had done so. Then she had heard the bell tinkling far back, miles back it seemed, in the darkness. She thought of a black goat that pranced with a bell on its hoof, a story her mother had told her about an evil spirit. The old priest exorcised it, and after that there was no more tinkling of the bell, but the goat was found—where was it found? She had forgotten!—with its neck broken.

Then after that, quite a while, she had heard the bell tinkle again. Who were these two people with her master? Her master had told her he would open the door himself that night, and had told her to go to bed. But wasn't there

such a thing as being too obedient? And her master perhaps in peril!

So she had gotten up. So she had found an excuse. The cook was away. She would go downstairs to set her own clock by the kitchen clock. If her master opened the study door and said: "Olga Bendovna, why are you here, when I told you to go to bed?" she would tell him about setting the clock.

So, clock in hand, she tiptoed down the stairs. And just when she was on the bottom step she heard a woman's voice raised, and Marakoff's voice, snarling and bitter.

She stopped, breathless. Then, clear, across Marakoff's snarling tone the voice of the woman. Was it a voice? Or was it a cold, sharp knife? "If you dare to touch me," the voice said, "I will kill you."

There! There! It was as she feared! Her master's life was threatened! She took the two steps necessary and lurched against the study door, at the same time turning the knob. She raised her two hands, one with the clock in it, and beat upon it, pounded on it.

Almost immediately the key snapped back in the lock. The door swung open. Marakoff let himself into the hall. He closed the door sharply behind him. His foot crunched the broken glass of the clock. His face was livid.

"What are you here for?" He hurled the words at her.

She shrank away from him, her eyes staring.

His eyes burned on her like live coals.

"Go to your room!" His voice was soft, but full of fury. Worse than if he had shouted at her. "Go to your room! Do not stir from it again!"

When she had reached the top of the stairs and was going

down the hall leading to her room at the back of the house, she heard Marakoff mounting the stairs behind her, but dared not look back. It was as though she were blown forward by the furious wind of Marakoff's anger. It carried her against her own door. She seized the knob with a shaking hand. Marakoff had now reached the open baize door which shut her part of the house away from the master's rooms. She swirled into her own room, closed her door, and leaned against it.

"Now lock your door!" came Marakoff's voice. "And keep it locked!"

She turned the key, in terror, yet hoping at the same time that Marakoff would not close and bolt the green baize door, shutting her off from him by one more lock.

She stayed closely in her room after that. What was going on belowstairs! There was a weak moon circled by a sooty rainbow, worse really than no light at all, and there was the horrible stillness of the house.

Who was this woman who had spoken those terrible words?

Then again the black goat with the bell in its hoof, and the tinkling of the bell far off.

Some one else had come to see her master. Who?

She strained her ears. But her room was so situated that she could not possibly have heard what was going on in Marakoff's study. She stood a moment looking out of the window, and thought she saw a shadowy form moving in the garden, then shut her eyes and turned away. She wondered whether her master had locked the door of the third story where the yellow ape was. Her clock, what with her beating upon the study door and the breaking of its glass, had

stopped. Olga picked it up and shook it to try to set it going again. It gave a few hesitant ticks, and then stopped, like a frightened thing.

For some reason this horrified her.

Olga Bendovna! Olga Bendovna! What a hideous thing fear is! Sit down and try to forget the goat, and the ape, and the little black god.

She determined not to try to sleep, but to wait and listen for a step on the stair leading to the third story. Her master always went up to look at the ape before he went to bed.

She thought of Kanaka. Kanaka gone and the great gorilla still there! Kanaka had said it was a sacred creature. A sacred devil! She had once asked Kanaka about some old scars on his arm, and he had told her how he and his African brothers made cuts and smeared them with each other's blood, to indicate they were blood brothers. Black heathen!

Why had she ever left Russia?

Suddenly she heard the sound she was waiting for, steps going up to the third story. Her master was safe then! What a fool she was! A few moments later she heard steps coming down again. Her master was safe then! She fumbled with relieved and shaking fingers at the fastenings of her dress; put on her coarse nightgown at last, and got into bed.

Ah, Olga Bendovna, have you been dreaming all this?

No. She wakened fully now, and heard the drip, drip, drip from the eaves. It was morning.

She remembered everything. The first thing she wanted to know was whether Marakoff, in his anger, had bolted the green baize door. When she was dressed she went and

tried it softly. Yes, he had. Never mind, she would go down to the kitchen the other way, and fix his breakfast tray for him. She would carry it up to his room. She would put it on the table beside his bed. She would put her two hands together, the way her mother had taught her long ago in Russia, when she was a child, and she would bow almost to the ground and say: "Master, forgive me! Last night I did what I should not. Today I will be obedient. Hold nothing against me."

And he would give her his forgiveness. That was the important thing. That first. And then while he sipped his tea she would hurry downstairs, and with the tongs she would take the little evil black god and lay it boldly on the fire, and turn her head away. And after a bit she would open her eyes and look. Was it possible to burn a god? Or would it be there still?

She busied herself about the kitchen. She was glad the old Danish cook was away. It was a comfort to be alone and have everything her own way.

"There now, you are ready!" Olga addressed the tray. Suddenly, as she often did, she raised her head sharply, and listened.

Was that her master?

She must hurry! She took up the tray and held it well out in front of her. "Forgive me!" her thought ran. "Forgive me, Sergius Marakoff! Hold nothing against me!"

When she got to the foot of the stairs she stopped and set the tray down on the hall table. Marakoff had cigarettes on the table by his bed, of course. But she would pay him a special attention and thoughtfulness. She would take up with her some of the cigarettes the Turkish ambassador had given

him. They were in Marakoff's study. ("Sergius Marakoff, hold nothing against me!")

It occurred to her suddenly that in there, in the study, the little black god would be standing on Sergius Marakoff's table. No. She would not go into the study; not until she went there finally to deal with the little black god. She might, however, open the door and close her eyes to avoid seeing it. She knew exactly where to put her hand on the cigarettes. They were in the Siberian copper bowl. It stood on the bookshelves. She had only to take three steps and reach out her hand. She did so.

At the third step her foot struck against something not soft exactly, but which gave. She opened her eyes. A few feet from her on the floor lay the little black god. Her gaze rested an instant on it in horror; then came slowly to that which lay at her feet—the long, slim, perfectly still form of Sergius Marakoff—the face deadly white, the eyes half closed and glazed!

It seemed to take Olga Bendovna's mind a long time to accept that still horror stretched at her feet. Then she clutched the table and swayed. Heavens! how still! Then she bent—bent—bent. With her large white fingers ("Forgive me, Sergius Marakoff! Hold nothing against me!") she touched the still hand. It was cold; she drew back, crouching!

She rose to her feet, pressing her doubled-up fingers hard against her lips.

A strange glazed look came into her eyes. She waited a moment as though gathering some dim thought. ("Olga Bendovna, you have been faithful to me. You will be faithful to me always.")

She turned, and as though by no will of her own, went and opened the drawer of his table and took from it a small metal box. Her broad white fingers felt for a key. There was none.

Without looking again at the still figure on the floor, she opened the door, and a little dazedly began mounting the stairs. When she got to the third story she stopped in front of a heavy, barred door. (Even without the key; even without the key. "You will be faithful to me, Olga Bendovna.")

She beat with her two hands on the door.

Not a sound.

She waited, looking about her wildly. Then she beat with her two hands again—beat—beat—beat!

"Devil! Devil! Where are you?"

Not a sound.

She seized the handle of the door and rattled it menacingly. To her horror, it turned and gave in her hand. The door opened wide. All the pulses in her body were pounding wildly in her fingers and ears, and chokingly in her throat.

The gorilla was not there. Only the bundle of straw in the corner, on which it slept; its hideous playthings—a broken gourd, a rattle made of a dried pomegranate, the iron bar fitted from wall to wall, on which it could lift itself by its long arms, and the iron collar and chains bolted into the space between the two windows.

Nothing else.

She swung around and hurried again down the stairs. Along the upper hall. Down the second flight of stairs. Years! Years! Olga Bendovna! There are years of horror in every step your foot takes now!

She sped along the lower hall. With frantic terrified fingers she turned the knob of the front door. She flung the door wide. She ran down the three stone steps and into the square. She doubled her two hands on her breast. She thrust her head high. Then she screamed—a long, shrill, ear-splitting scream.

A man came running.



Chapter Five

NEWS AT CRANBROOK

"Did the ape kill Marakoff?" said Lord Sleugh, reflectively. He leaned back in his chair and let his gaze travel appreciatively around the comfortable hall of Cranbrook House. "I wonder——"

The early afternoon papers had published the first report of what the press designated as "The Smith Square Ape Murder Mystery."

The account was necessarily brief. Marakoff's house-keeper, Olga Bendovna, was too overcome as yet by the shock of finding her master's body, to tell a very coherent story of the happenings of the previous night.

All that seemed clear was that Marakoff—the great Marakoff—was dead, murdered, and that Marakoff's ape was missing.

Lord Sleugh had brought the news down to Cranbrook with him.

"Though it is still too soon to evolve any satisfactory theory," he continued, "the police have discovered three facts which are not without significance. First"—he ticked them off on his fingers—"the safe in Marakoff's study was broken open and the contents left in disorder. Second, the notes of his book on psychological research—he had promised its publication to the scientific meeting he had addressed only that morning—cannot be found, And, third, the man-

agers of Barclay's Bank testify that on the morning previous to the murder Dr. Marakoff had drawn ten thousand pounds in notes. If this money was in the murdered man's safe at the time of the murder, it is there no longer."

Miss Leila Merrington dropped her monocle with a convulsive raising and lowering of her left eyebrow.

"Of course, as a K. C., a pillar of conservatism and an authority on fishes, I respect your opinion," she barked. "Though I fail to understand why, in the face of such facts, you persist in believing that silly story about the ape."

"It is at least as acceptable as any other until Scotland Yard issues a statement."

"Scotland Yard!" Miss Merrington snapped her fingers. "Scotland Yard's a fool. So is Downing Street. But Lenin-grad's no fool. The gorilla! Pooh! A piece of stage machinery! While your precious Scotland Yard is chasing apes around Westminster, the murderer of Marakoff with ten thousand pounds in his pocket is probably travelling in a first-class private compartment in the Orient Express on his way to Moscow."

"I wish I might be so sure of it," Lord Sleugh rejoined. "By the way, who is coming tonight?"

"Just ourselves, Tony Ogle, and that American friend of Frank's. Shackleton's the name."

Lord Sleugh's eyes narrowed slightly.

"Shackleton? Ah yes! I remember."

"That you don't like him?"

Lord Sleugh did not reply. She pressed the question. "Because you think he is one of those family-hunting Americans?"

"Let us say rather that my fondness for Joan makes me suspicious of any young man she seems to favour. By the way, has this Shackleton any money?"

"Lord! No!" Miss Merrington disposed summarily of Ned Shackleton's financial rating. "Not a farthing. Extraordinary for an American, isn't it? He's an anthropologist—such a gruesome occupation! Digging around in people's coffins and analysing their dust. Or is that archæology! Not that it matters. What does matter is that he has bewitched Frank into wanting to go out to Africa with him."

"It is precisely that that I object to," Lord Sleugh said, decisively. "I went over the whole matter with Frank yesterday. I gave him to understand that I shall not advance the money for such an expedition. My trusteeship ends in ten months. After that, of course, he can do as he sees fit. Until then, his regular allowance must suffice."

"Whatever Frank's regular allowance is, it won't do that," Miss Merrington replied, shrewdly. "I shan't rest easy in my bed until young Shackleton's well out of the country and Frank begins to show a healthy interest in the Gaiety chorus again."

Derek Merrington, followed by Tony Ogle, came through the window from the terrace in time to catch the final words. "Don't tell me he's stopped?" he enquired. "How disappointing!"

"That'th what chorutheth uthually are," the voice of the Honorable Tony was raised in regretful protest. "It'th been my experienthe——"

His voice trailed off into regions of unexplained cognizance.

"What's your theory about this murder, Dobby?" Derek broke in. "Tony's been filling me up with the gruesome details—apes and Africans and what not."

"What is yours?"

Seventeen-year-old Derek was not a Merrington at all in Aunt Leila's opinion. Where Joan and Frank were tall and fair, his was a sturdy, close-knit body. His dark, vivid face was like his mother's people. The late Lady Merrington had been a Miss O'Dair of Connaught. He strode now impatiently up and down the hearth rug.

"As I see it," he said, "it is one of Marakoff's mistakes. A rotten unfortunate one, as it turned out for him. He went up to look at the gorilla just before he went to bed; the housekeeper person testifies she heard footsteps. Perhaps he found the beast a bit restive or vicious, and he administered punishment. Then he forgot to lock the door. Probably he got to thinking about his book and so on. Anyway, he went downstairs again to the study and opened up the safe. As I work it out, upstairs, the gorilla, thrashing around and hating Marakoff like sin, tried the door handle. The door opened, and out he came. He stole down the stairs and into the study. There he grabbed up the little idol from the desk and knocked Marakoff cold. Afterwards the ape opened the window and got away. Simple enough!"

"Taking ten thousand pounds in its vest pocket, I suppose," interposed Aunt Leila. She set down her teacup with vigour and clapped her hands sharply twice.

Immediately, as though by magic, a tall and powerful African manservant appeared in the doorway.

Bimbi was the most curious possession of Cranbrook

House. A M'pangwe tribesman, six feet tall. Sir Hugh had brought him from Nigeria sixteen years before.

He stood silent and unsubservient, awaiting Miss Leila's command. This came with customary directness:

"Bimbi, fetch Miss Joan."

The African made a little deferential movement of his head and withdrew.

Derek ran his fingers through his hair.

"The ten thousand pounds is rather a sticker," he said, ruefully.

"It wath three to one at the Ragth that Marakoff'th African thervant did him in," Tony Ogle informed them, importantly. "The man left that morning. Marakoff probably docked hith wageth, or thomething. Then the chap com'th back, bumpth him off, pocketth the ten thouthand, and goth off with the gorilla."

"Who goes off with a gorilla?" Joan came swiftly into the room.

Tony Ogle expanded gratefully.

"It'th Marakoff," he explained happily. Tony was always happy. "He'th been murdered, you know."

Joan stared at him, incredulously.

"Murdered? What do you mean?"

"Somebody killed him last night," Derek said, briefly. "Hit him on the head with a curious sort of idol thing. It looks, on the face of it, as though the ape had done it. The gorilla's missing. But there are other things missing, too—Marakoff's notes for his book, and ten thousand pounds, and the African servant."

He swung around suddenly to Lord Sleugh. "You know

Africa, Dobby. What about the blood brotherhoods? I've heard that Marakoff was hated by the natives in Africa when he worked among them, you know. Are some of those native secret societies powerful enough to engineer a thing like that? Murder for revenge, eh?"

Lord Sleugh looked thoughtfully into the fire. "That is difficult to say. It is certainly one of the things Scotland Yard will have to investigate. It is believed there is a centre of the blacks in London. And no one can gauge the power of the blood brotherhoods. They have been known to keep feuds alive for years. If Marakoff had injured a member of one of the brotherhoods, it is quite conceivable the others might learn of it and plot to avenge their brother."

"Pah!" Aunt Leila exploded, scornfully. "African blood brotherhoods and apes! I tell you it was the Soviet that killed him. I've always heard that Marakoff belonged to the old imperial circle. He was an intimate friend of the Archduke Alexis. You say the man was rich?" She turned interrogatively to Lord Sleugh.

"Enormously so," came the answer. "Not in money alone, but in holdings and properties in many parts of the world. Some of them, I may say, of not inconsiderable interest to the British government."

"I know he had jewel mineth," Tony Ogle contended. "He uthed to carry a lot of unthet jewelth in hith pocket. Pothitive fact. He took 'em out onthe in the train, and thowed 'em to my governor, a whole handful of dazzlerth! Gave him quite a turn—what? He thought Marakoff wath crazy."

Bimbi came in, bringing a telegram for Joan. He brought, too, the evening post and the late editions of the London

papers. Derek reached avidly for the *Daily Mail*. Joan tore open the yellow envelope. She read:

"Regret impossible to dine with you tonight. Many apologies. SHACKLETON."

"Your American?" Aunt Leila asked.

"Yes. He isn't coming."

"Does that mean Frank isn't coming, either?"

"I suppose so. He doesn't say."

She tossed the telegram into the fire. She was surprised at her own sense of disappointment. Why had Ned Shackleton not come? He was to have seen Marakoff on the evening before, the evening of the murder. She shivered slightly. He had counted on interesting the Russian in his expedition. Had he seen him? Or had he arrived too late? She turned swiftly away from the fire. In a voice that she strove to make casual, she asked: "When did the murder happen? Do they know?"

Derek emerged from the *Daily Mail*. "They've spread it well over two pages," he said, exultantly. "Greatest murder mystery London has had for years. Jolly good reading. The housekeeper tells her story again, in full this time. It seems there was a woman in it. She heard her threaten Marakoff: 'If you touch me, I will kill you.' And they've found a new witness——"

Joan interrupted him sharply: "When was Marakoff killed, Derek? I asked you that before."

It was Lord Sleugh who answered her. "The medical examiner believes that death occurred about eight hours before the finding of the body," he said, evenly. "If he is correct, that would place the murder at half past eleven."

Half past eleven!

What had Ned Shackleton said: "Marakoff wishes to see me. I'm to go to his house tonight at eleven."

Her heart pounded so violently that it seemed the others must hear it as well as herself. The knuckles of her hand that clutched the back of the chair whitened. Derek was reading on, aloud:

"A new witness has been found in the person of Alfred Augustus Brown, 29, the driver of a taxi-cab. Brown was driving through Smith Square shortly before midnight on Tuesday when a young man came down the steps of the house occupied by Dr. Marakoff, and hailed him. Brown drew up to the curb. The young man went back into the house. Presently he returned, escorting a lady who was wrapped in a long cloak of gold brocade. The lady was obviously overcome, for she leaned heavily on the gentleman's arm. Brown did not see her face. She wore a veil of black lace. The turned-up fur collar of the cloak was fastened with a gold clasp. The gentleman helped the lady into the cab and they were driven to the corner of Pall Mall and Old Burlington Street. There they got out and walked away. Whether they entered a house near by or were driven elsewhere in another cab, Brown cannot say. He saw a fare some distance down the street, and speeded up to meet it.

"Questioned about the man, Brown could only say that he was young and blond. He wore a silk hat and a light overcoat over dinner dress. Two

things Brown did notice particularly. One was a Daimler motor parked across the Square, and the heavy gold clasp set, he thought, with a dull green stone which fastened the fur collar of the woman's wrap."

"*Cherchez la femme!*" Derek flung down the paper. "Maybe it was a woman who killed Marakoff. Those foreign men, you know!"

"Or the young man killed him because of the woman," Ogle took it up. "Thuppothe Marakoff had a rival, thome younger chap the lady fanthied. And they quarrelled, and the young man killed him." He beamed upon the company, obviously pleased with his own cleverness.

Derek amended the suggestion: "Why not some older duffer the lady had chucked for Marakoff?"

"How can you?" Joan flung out, fiercely. "It's horrible, ghastly! A man murdered, and you're making a joke of it!"

She turned to Lord Sleugh. "Dobby, who do you think killed Marakoff?"

Lord Sleugh had fitted his two thumbs and fore-fingers together into a triangle. He surveyed it speculatively.

"I think," he said, slowly, "that one man might have killed Marakoff for his money; one man might have killed him for his notes; one man might have killed him for his ape. Or, possibly"—he lifted his head sharply; Joan felt his eyes, direct and searching, riveted on hers—"or, possibly"—his voice was low and very smooth—"one man might have killed him for all three."



Chapter Six

IN THE NIGHT

WHEN the whirr of Lord Sleugh's motor had died away down the avenue, bearing that gentleman back to London officialdom, Joan stood for a long time in the empty hall. With nightfall, the murky November day had broken into storm. She heard with dismay the wind and the fierce beat of the rain.

Through the partially open door of the billiard-room she could see the bridge-players; Aunt Leila making an unwilling partner to Tony, and Derek playing the dummy hand.

She tried desperately to clear a path through the confusion of suspicions and fears that fogged her mind.

The scraping of a chair on the floor, Aunt Leila's voice triumphant, "Two and ninepence, Derek"; Derek's short schoolboy laugh, "I'll go home with you, Tony, if the Sealyhams are as good as you say"—warned her that the rubber was over.

She did not want to see any of them. She could not bear their questions. She wanted to be by herself. She went swiftly down the corridor to the music-room at the end of the left wing. No one would intrude upon her there.

She found it lighted only by the stand-lamp near the piano, that shed a warm, inviting glow about the instrument, leaving the rest of the lovely old room in shadow. The music-room was more her own than any other room in the house. It was a comfort to be here.

But there, too, and as though they had come step for step with her, she felt the presence of those four people with whom, it seemed now, her world must persistently deal. And all of them suddenly so strange to her:

Frank, whom before this she had looked on even perhaps a little patronizingly; a younger brother to whom, when occasion demanded, she could give wise advice, or, if need were, a wise, sisterly severity, now Frank had crashed through all these old relations and taken on a dreadful force and determination of his own. Now he had slipped out of her hold, as it were, and stood wilful and dominant in a world of his own, utterly apart and different from her world.

And Ned Shackleton, who had secretly meant so much to her, so that the lifting or dropping of his glance had stirred her, and his coming had been a thing to long for, unadmittedly. She had rested deliciously in the belief that he and she understood each other as only those do who are fitted for each other. And now—what did she know of him? How could she fathom the sudden gulf that had opened between them?

And Dornia Eleutherios, seeming to stand between these two men, smiling invitingly at her out of a world of sinister sophistication. What part was Dornia Eleutherios to play in her life from now on?

And Marakoff? Marakoff murdered, and unable to speak or explain anything. Marakoff suddenly powerless who had been so powerful, yet so powerful still, too, in a strange and terrible fashion. Marakoff, who until today had been to her just "the yellow-ape man," as she had flippantly called him; hardly more than a mere name in the papers;

Marakoff had entered now, silently and secretly, the most intimate chambers of her mind, and she had no power to turn him out. Marakoff had laid a dead and powerful hand on all the things that most intimately and dearly concerned her. Marakoff was as real in her life, now, as though he stood there looking out at her in the dim shadows of the music-room.

And between these four people and herself, like a secret thing shared by them and secretly understood by them, perhaps better than she understood it, the thought of that secret valley of which Ned Shackleton had talked to her, and which the natives dared not name. She remembered the sign for the valley which Ned Shackleton had told her also meant death or a warning of death. In her anger about Dornia Eleutherios, she had torn up the little paper on which he had drawn the map and the sign. That all seemed trifling and flippancy to her now. But the sign itself, invested by her secret dread and fear with a more sinister significance, was burned into her memory. She could never forget it.

She went quickly to the glass doors that gave on the terrace and opened them. A gust of wind and rain tore at her fiercely so that she had to struggle to shut them again.

She bolted them. A sudden flash of lightning showed her the terrace flooded with pools of shivering rain water and a mass of sodden leaves, and the great trees of the park beyond tossing wildly against the sky. The storm seemed to presage more than the ending of autumn, more than the coming of winter. It seemed to be buffeting at the very foundations of Cranbrook House. And it was as though all the presences in her mind knew this and were thinking of it.

To rid herself of these things, she sat down at the piano

and began to play chords, and little, wandering, tentative harmonies that resolved themselves finally into the melody of an old song, one that her mother used to sing :

“Kathleen, mavourneen,
The grey dawn is breaking. . . .”

She sang it softly, under her breath, thankful for the safe conduct the words offered her away from her own thoughts.

Suddenly, in the interval between verse and refrain, a sound that was neither wind nor rain startled her—the quick, stealthy pad of footsteps on the terrace outside. She paused tensely, her fingers still holding the chord, her chin lifted over her shoulder, and waited for the sound again.

It came.

Something was moving along the terrace close to the house wall. When she shut the window she had omitted to draw the curtains. In the soft brightness of the lamp the window was a black oblong filled with menacing night. Her eyes could make out nothing against that curtain of darkness ; but to anyone outside, she knew herself to be as clearly revealed and as defenceless as a figure on a lighted stage.

She rose and with a single gesture snapped out the light. Then, under cover of the total darkness, she crossed to the terrace window and laid her hand on the latch.

“Who is there?” she said, sharply.

Out of the blackness, on the other side of the pane, a hand was reached to meet hers.

She drew back, shuddering.

The hand caught at the glass doors and shook them violently. A voice said hoarsely :

"Jo-John! Let me in, Jo-John!"

Frank!

She shot back the bolt, turned the latch, pulling the long doors open and inward. A gust of furious wind, and an eddy of sodden ivy leaves swirled round the figure that stumbled across the threshold.

She slammed the doors behind him. "Frank! You frightened me so! Where did you come from?"

He did not answer. In the unlighted room his bulk loomed blacker than the darkness, and swayed a little, uncertainly. Joan started to feel her way to the electric switch, but he stopped her roughly.

"Don't turn on the lights!" His voice was soft, yet sharp. "I'm here only for a minute. It's just good-bye. Then London. No time to waste! Drive like the devil! Then tomorrow, off for Africa!"

She clutched his arms, the wet from his dripping coat seeping between her tense fingers.

"Not Africa, Frank! You're not going to Africa! Dobby said he wouldn't let you have the money!"

He swayed tipsily.

"Wrong you are, old girl!" He put a wet hand sentimentally on her hair. "Good-bye. By God! I'm glad I don't need Dobby's money now."

"Frank! You're not going! I shan't let you go! You must wait!"

"Can't wait!" he said, drowsily. "Got to find the Valley. I've got the formula, and now I've got the money. Ned's got Marakoff's notes——"

She broke from him in horror.

"Marakoff's notes! What do you mean?"

"Tha's true! 'Scuse me! I wasn't a gentleman!" His voice filled with a rolling, exaggerated regret. "Promised not to tell! Broke my promise! You just forget about it, Jo-John! See? You just forget about it!"

Then he took her fiercely in his arms, hid her face against his coat, and kissed her hair.

She could not see that at the moment the glass doors opened and a stealthy, stooping figure crept into the room.

"Came to get a few things I needed," Frank whispered. "Saw you playing at the piano. Had to say good-bye. Never mind, if you don't understand! Nobody understands! Just one woman. It's because of her I'm going to the Valley, and I'd go if all the devils in hell were let loose."

She struggled from him and tried again to reach the electric-light switch. She would switch on the lights, if necessary, cry out, and have him stopped.

At that instant, back of her in the darkness, the crouching figure rose tall and powerful. She felt herself seized from behind and swung back lightly. A powerful hand was put over her mouth. At the same time she could see, silhouetted, the other hand of the figure that held her wave a warning and imperative signal of departure to Frank.

Frank swayed a moment, then without a word obeyed the signal; went through the open door onto the terrace and was gone.

In the darkness, the figure that held her released her, as quickly as it had seized her, and before she could turn to try to see who it was, sprang like a panther into the darkness. She could sense it, rather than hear it, moving away quickly and softly, as an animal moves, with great sureness and stealth.

She rushed out onto the terrace and called:

"Frank! Frank!"

There was no answer.

In the whirl of wind and storm she could hear from the driveway the muffled sound of a motor. The next moment she saw Frank running past the rhododendrons. Just at that instant a dark crouching figure leaped down from the other end of the terrace to the lawn below.

Almost at the same moment two figures sprang from the shadows across a little open space of lawn. There was a sudden spurt of flame, followed by a sharp crack.

Once she caught a glimpse of Frank running desperately toward the driveway. There was the sound of crashing shrubbery. Again a revolver spat out a death threat, and a voice cried, "Stop there!"

It was answered by the roar of a motor. Then a long, low car was driven without lights and at terrific speed down the avenue.

Joan leaned against the balustrade of the terrace. Her eyes searched the lawn and the masses of shrubbery for the two men. But she did not see them.

At last, wet and shivering, she went back into the house again, and bolted the door behind her. She stood breathing hard, listening for some sound in the house that would show whether the others had heard. But apparently no one had. Aunt Leila was a sound sleeper, and the servants' rooms were in the opposite wing. Everything was absurdly still.

She went upstairs softly. In the warm, curtained security of her bedroom she suddenly hated that security. She wanted to tear open the windows and let the storm in, the storm through which Frank, with head low and shoulders hunched,

was driving furiously. Was he being pursued? And by whom? And why——?

Suddenly, she became aware that her door was being opened slowly and softly by some one in the hall outside. She turned tensely. "Who is that?"

The light of a candle, carefully shielded by a hand cupped about the flame, shone around the edge of the door. A face appeared above the candle flame, a round anxious face—the face of Toppins, her maid, who had been her mother's maid.

"It's only me, miss," came in Toppin's mournful accents. "I knocked, miss, but I think you didn't hear. I was afraid of waking you. It's Mr. Frank, miss. Do you know where Mr. Frank is?"

"What do you want of Mr. Frank?" Joan spoke sharply.

Toppins came farther into the room. She wore a flannel jacket over a nightgown. Her head was tied up in a towel.

"Oh, miss, I met Mr. Frank creepin' up the stairs. And I said, 'What are you doing, Mr. Frank, darling?' and he said, 'Toppins,' he said, 'I'm off to Hafrica!' and I thought he was saying it just to tease me, knowing 'ow I 'ate the very word Hafrica, and because he'd been drinkin' a little, maybe, too. But I've been to look in his room, and the drawers of his dresser are all upset, miss, like he'd been hunting for something. Do you think he had, miss?"

Joan looked coldly and severely at her, and forced herself to speak casually:

"Yes, he came back to say good-bye to me. He is going to Africa."

Toppins gave a little squawk of dismay. "Oh, miss! Not Hafrica!" The candle in her hand bobbed uncertainly.

"There's only ill luck comes to this house out of Hafrica!" she wailed. "My lady, first; and now Mr. Frank! and Bimbi —'e's gone, too, miss. They're saying 'e done it ——"

"Who is saying what?"

"It's this murder, miss, that 'appened in London, Sergeant McCann came over from the village, and 'e's askin' for Bimbi. He says they've been telephonin' from Scotland Yard. And it's Bimbi they're askin' for. McCann's gone to telephone them now. He says one of his men saw a man sneakin' around by the terrace not an hour ago, and talked about a grey motor-car going by; goin' like the devil's mare, it was, McCann says. Excuse me, miss, it's no fit language, but that's what he said. And he thinks it was Bimbi. I went to look in Bimbi's room, and Bimbi's gone. All his little darlin' coats, miss, they're gone."

"Of course Bimbi's gone," Joan caught her up sharply. "I won't have you going on like that. Cheap gossip! And to the police, too! Haven't I told you Mr. Frank's gone? Doesn't Bimbi always go everywhere with Mr. Frank? Go to bed, now, and don't let me hear any more such nonsense!"

"Yes, miss."

Mournfully Toppins withdrew. The door closed after her. Bimbi was gone!

A new horror swept over Joan. What was it that had been said that afternoon about Marakoff's having incurred the enmity of the African blood brotherhoods? She remembered that Bimbi sometimes went to consult a voodoo woman in some lower part of London. They had often laughed about it at Cranbrook. Once Derek had vowed, in sport, that he was going to consult her himself. Poor Bimbi, with his almost childlike mind, and his strange superstitions, and

his doglike devotions and loyalties! Could other blacks have been employing Bimbi for their own ends?

The door opened again and Toppins thrust in her head. "Excuse me, miss. Forgive me, miss. But would you come?"

"What is it?"

Toppins led the way along the hall to the door of Frank's room. The candle flame smoked in the draught, and turned blue. Toppins shielded it with her hand.

"I didn't see it when I came before, miss," she whispered. "Look, miss!—on his bed!"

Toppins lifted the candle.

Joan, clutching her dressing-gown about her, bent and looked. It seemed to her suddenly that all the horror of that night culminated in what she saw. On the white counterpane lay seven twigs of ivy arranged in a sinister pattern—



The sign of the Valley! Or was it the sign and forewarning of death? Who had put it there? And why?



Chapter Seven

CHECKMATE

THE household at Cranbrook had been much disturbed by Frank's sudden departure.

"I must say I think it very strange," Miss Leila had said, stiffly.

"He stayed only a minute," Joan explained, "and it was very late. He didn't want to disturb you. He left his love and good-bye to you and Derek."

"Frank was never known to be in the least careful of anyone's feelings before," Aunt Leila sniffed. "But to take Bimbi! He might at least have consulted us ——"

Joan had made as plausible a story as she could to cover Frank's furtive coming and going. Of the pursuing figures and the revolver-shots, or that strange, sinister sign in her brother's room, she had said nothing. Toppins was pledged to secrecy.

Meantime, the Marakoff murder was no longer front-page news. The coroner's jury had returned the verdict, "death from a blow on the temple." The Russian Consulate had taken charge of the body and Marakoff's papers.

Aunt Leila, reading the morning and evening newspapers, felt quite cheated. "Now that was a really interesting murder," she said, running her monocled eye up and down the columns, hoping still to find something about it. "Here, Joan, see if you can find anything."

But Joan refused to be drawn into anything that related to the murder.

"I'm really not interested," she said. "I don't like that kind of thing, and I don't see any reason for pretending to."

"I'll tell you what I think, Aunt Leila, I think you've missed a trick," said Derek. "Don't you know that the guilty person is always the one you least suspect?"

"Now, Derek, what do you mean?" said Aunt Leila.

"Well, I don't see why it shouldn't be Tony," Derek said. "Tony goes to Marakoff's and says, 'Look here, old Top, it's been my experienthe ——'"

"Derek, stop!" said Aunt Leila. "I won't have you lisping like that!"

"Of course," said Derek, with a wave of the hand, "Marakoff can't stand Tony's lisp any more than you can, so Marakoff shouts at him, 'Get out of here!' Tony backs out politely, but keeps on talking. 'I've heard it thaid that in Ruththia ——' Of course, Marakoff can't stand that, so he picks up the little god and violently kills himself!"

"Really!" Aunt Leila retorted, "I see no object in making a fool of yourself. And one edition of Tony Ogle is quite enough."

But later, Derek was saying soberly to Lord Sleugh, "Look here, Dobby, I've heard something about the Marakoff murder I don't believe you know."

Lord Sleugh looked up indifferently. "Yes?"

"First of all, Frank makes a fool of himself," said Derek, "by going away suddenly in a manner that makes him seem thoroughly suspicious of *something*. Now it seems some bright angel at the club has offered the information that the Daimler seen before Marakoff's house the night of the

murder was Frank's, also that Frank was at the Topaz Cat that night with the hussy, or siren, or whatever you've a mind to call her, who beautifully decorated the idle hours of Marakoff. And that then, or earlier that same evening, the woman was wearing a gold cloak. See how infernally they've pieced the business together? And this same bright angel says Scotland Yard knows about it and is working on that clue."

"I'm really not interested in club gossip," said Lord Sleugh. "But at which club did you get the information?"

"Never mind where I got it," Derek blared. "The question is what are we going to do about it? Do you know anything about this woman? Is she a siren or just a vamp?"

"I am really not altogether a connoisseur, Derek," said Lord Sleugh, stiffly, "of the difference between sirens and vamps."

"What's her name?"

"It seems to me," said Lord Sleugh, grimly, "if you don't even know the lady's name ——"

"Well, what I do know," said Derek, kicking a footstool from in front of him and getting up, "is that I'd like to punch Scotland Yard in the nose. How does it strike you—the Merrington name on the front page, 'Young Scion of an Old House'—what? Eh? How does that strike across your consciousness?"

Lord Sleugh looked up tolerantly.

"I thought your theory was that it was the ape that killed Marakoff."

"Well, you'll notice," said Derek, with dignity, "the ape hasn't been found. But this other is something that I think ought to be looked into. It oughtn't to be allowed to grow."

"I shall inform myself about it," said Lord Sleugh, quietly. Derek rammed his hands into his pockets and squared his shoulders.

"I wish you would."

"That wasn't a wise move, my dear."

Lord Sleugh studied the board a moment longer, then took up his red bishop between his thumb and forefinger, lifted Joan's white knight with his fourth and little finger, replaced the knight with the bishop. "Check"—he kept his fingers on the bishop a moment, fully considering his play. Then he released the piece—"mate." He leaned back, "Will you have another game?"

"No, if you please. I think I'm tired." She began putting the pieces in the drawer of the chess table.

With his head low, and a little smile about his lips, Lord Sleugh watched her.

"You weren't in your usual good form tonight, Joan. Is anything troubling you? Has Derek been alarming you?"

Her eyes went to him swiftly. Seeing the look in his, she laughed a little hard laugh.

"Poor old Derry, he's always so keen for excitement. Now it's a crime in the family that he's trying to conjure up."

"Have you thought at all that Frank might be implicated in any way?" He did not look at her now, but it was as though his hearing watched her more keenly than his eyes could have done.

"I've thought of it every way, Dobby," she said, miserably. "I'm sick of thinking of it. Of course, Frank was away that night, and Bimbi, too. You know how he always shadows Frank if he thinks Frank has been drinking. And I'm sure

Frank was drinking that night. It may be true that Frank was with Madame Eleutherios. I've pictured Frank taking Madame Eleutherios to Marakoff's and waiting for her; then a quarrel between her and Marakoff, and Frank defending her, and perhaps Bimbi slipping in from somewhere—that way he has—and then ——”

Lord Sleugh waited, not taking his eyes from her.

“Then what do you think happened?”

“How can you be sure with a woman like that?” she said, bitterly. “You remember I asked you who she was? I wanted to know because that day Frank and Ned Shackleton and I lunched at the Savoy she sent Frank a note and he went to talk with her. Later, in the lounge, she came up to Ned Shackleton. I can't help thinking she may have involved both of them. From the way she looked at Ned Shackleton that day, I think she's in love with him.”

“I don't suppose you would care to tell me just what you really do think happened that night of Marakoff's murder? Your viewpoint is new and refreshing. Do you think Madame Eleutherios inveigled your Mr. Shackleton to murder Marakoff?”

She shot an indignant glance at him.

“What I think is that she was there. Frank may have been with her. I don't know as to that. And I think, after Marakoff was killed, it was she who took the money, and she who took Marakoff's notes. I'm convinced it was she who gave the notes to Ned Shackleton. Maybe she said Marakoff wanted him to have them. She could have posed as knowing Marakoff's intimate wishes.”

A new light came into Lord Sleugh's steely eyes. He rose and spoke very quietly:

"You are sure that Shackleton has Marakoff's notes?"

"Yes. Frank told me." She went on to outline her idea of what happened. "Then after Marakoff and Ned Shackleton had their interview, Madame Eleutherios appeared. Who knows, perhaps she had one of her admirers with her who hated Marakoff. There was a quarrel ——"

Lord Sleugh walked up and down a moment. She saw that his usually pale face was flushed. At last he came and stood by the table, fingering a book with long, thin, thoughtful fingers. There was a look in his eyes that she did not understand, but which frightened her—cold, and at the same time glad.

"This changes everything," he said, quietly.

"What do you mean?"

He raised his head, and watched her, as though he wanted to get the full pleasure of her reaction to his words.

"I mean," he said, bitterly, "that a young man, like your young American, who gets himself involved with a beautiful notorious woman, a young man who has in his possession evidence that would be of superlative value to the State in the investigation of a murder, and who does not give it up ——"

She watched him with startled eyes.

"I had not told you before," he said. "You and Frank and Derek have been somewhat under my care, and I may say that in my own way I have been very fond of you. I have been worried about Frank. Derek is right. The suspicions have been turning slowly, but very strongly, against him. I may tell you that I am leaving for Africa day after tomorrow. I was going with an anxious mind to use what-

ever influence I have to protect Frank. I shall now go with an easier mind. If Ned Shackleton has Marakoff's notes . . ."

She almost sprang at him and caught his arm.

"Dobby! You wouldn't?"

"Ah!" he said, coldly. "It is precisely as I supposed—you care for this young American. The question is would you rather have your lover or your brother arrested for the murder of Marakoff?"

When Lord Sleugh saw Sir Esme Wilton the following morning he allowed Sir Esme to play all his cards and make every count.

"You haven't been able, I assume," said Sir Esme, taking up pencils and papers and putting them in carefully considered places on his table, so as to clear a space where he might rest his arms on the polished top, lean on them, and look at Lord Sleugh with his characteristically penetrating gaze, square through the middle of his spectacles. "Certain things have of course been eliminated. The Bendovna woman tells too clear a story, and her devotion to Marakoff is too well established . . . But to get back. . . . I assume you have not been able to establish an alibi for your ward, young Merrington."

"No." Lord Sleugh seated himself. "But the truth is we have no real proof of who it was who was at the house in Smith Square at eleven."

"I thought," said Sir Esme, "we were fairly well agreed that the circumstantial evidence points strongly to your ward. I don't think it has been denied that it was his car

that the taxi-driver saw in Smith Square at that hour. That still stands, I believe."

"You have agreed to let the case rest in my hands," Lord Sleugh offered.

"Most certainly," Sir Esme replied. "I'm not anxious, for a good many reasons"—he shot Lord Sleugh a shrewd yet embarrassed look—"to take any hand in this affair myself. You know how I feel about that. I'm damned glad to have you look after the matter, and I—er ——" he looked away, and waved a large hand—"I rely on your tact; but the report that's made has got to be satisfactory. . . . We can't seem, I mean, to shield your ward."

Lord Sleugh put up a pacific hand, as though to indicate that Sir Esme could trust him as to that.

"I am leaving, as you know, for Africa tomorrow," he said. "I merely stopped by to say that since I saw you yesterday I have gathered some interesting information."

"Yes?"

Lord Sleugh turned his glance slowly to Sir Esme, who leaned to receive it. "I must ask you to let everything rest for a time. I need only say that I now have reason to believe that some one, not my ward, had an appointment with Marakoff at eleven o'clock."

Sir Esme's eyebrows went up. "You mean you have tracked down just who was there at that hour?"

Lord Sleugh rose. "I mean," he said, with a quiet resolution, "that I shall take advantage of your promise that the whole matter may rest for a time—that no charge will be pressed against my ward. Further, I hope before too long a time to have a full report of all the facts to turn over to you."

"That's it!" said Sir Esme, cordially, rising and rubbing his hands, one over the other, as though he were washing them. He offered one of them to Lord Sleugh. By George! Sleugh was the man. There was satisfaction, and honour as well, in having to do with a man like that!



Chapter Eight

THE GOLD CLOAK

JOAN MERRINGTON'S ring at the door of the house in Old Burlington Street where Ned Shackleton had his lodgings was answered by a comfortable-looking woman; obviously somebody's upper housemaid who had married somebody's butler and taken over the house of bachelor flats.

"Is Mr. Shackleton at home?" Joan asked, hurriedly. "Mr. James Shackleton?"

"I can't say when he'll be back, miss. But it may be in a little while. Will you come in and wait?" The woman held back the door, and Joan stepped before her into the hall. "Mr. Edward's rooms are open. If you'd be so good as to wait there. Mr. Edward's gone to Africa. I'm to let the rooms for him while he's away."

"Has he been gone long?" Joan hoped her tone was as casual as her words.

"Nearly a week, miss. Saturday it was he left. All the way by airplane," she added, importantly, "in his and Mr. Merrington's own plane, from Paris."

Joan made a hasty mental calculation. It was on Friday night that Frank had come down to Cranbrook. Then they had gone, as he threatened, on the following day.

The woman led the way up two short flights of stairs, took a key from her pocket, and unlocked a door. It led directly into a plainly furnished sitting-room. "When Mr. James

Shackleton comes, I'll tell him you are here, miss." She went out, closing the door behind her.

It was a relief to know that she would soon see James Shackleton. Since her conversation with Lord Sleugh, her one idea had been to get to him. Fearful that she might not find him at home that afternoon, and determined to see him, she had told Aunt Leila she would probably spend the night in town.

Now she looked about her, frankly curious. This was Ned Shackleton's home. At least, all the home that he had, except the thatched hut in the stockade of logs on the Sanaga. A direct, purposeful sort of room with its solid, unobtrusive furniture, and the rows of books ranged in long, soldierly phalanxes.

Through an open door she could look into a bedroom of an even more severe simplicity. Then suddenly her gaze focussed on something that was flung over the footboard of the narrow iron bed—something that gleamed like a pool of sunlight in the London murk—a shimmering gold fabric trimmed with sable—a woman's cloak.

Suddenly she was back at Cranbrook and Derek was reading eagerly the account of the Marakoff murder: "A woman in a gold cloak, a cloak with a fur collar, and fastened with a gold clasp——"

For a moment she felt oddly faint.

Then she went swiftly toward it.

She wanted to touch it. She wanted to feel it. But at first, she could not bring herself to do so. Then, with an effort at self-mastery, she stooped and ran her hand quickly over the fur collar.

No, there was no clasp!

At that moment she heard quick, light steps on the stair landing outside. The door opened. She turned to face, not James Shackleton, as she had supposed, but a woman—the woman with the golden eyes, Dornia Eleutherios.

It was she who spoke first: "The housekeeper said I should find you here. You are Miss Merrington, are you not?"

Her voice was smooth and was golden like her eyes.

Joan said, stiffly: "Yes, I am Joan Merrington. I am waiting to see Mr. Shackleton."

"I, also, came to see Mr. Shackleton."

"It is Mr. James Shackleton I am waiting for," Joan went on. "If it's Ned Shackleton you have come to see, he has left London. He has gone to Africa."

"Yes?"

Dornia Eleutherios betrayed no surprise.

She came across the room to the bed, and took up with her fingers a fold of the cloak. "How odd! A woman's cloak, of gold brocade!" She raised her eyes to Joan's. "Is it yours?"

"No, it is not mine." Joan's voice was deathly chill.

"How did it come here?"

Joan did not reply.

"I think you must know," the woman said, evenly, "it is dangerous for that cloak to be here. You have read the accounts of the Marakoff murder. You know there was a woman in a gold cloak. You know that Ned Shackleton was there at Marakoff's house that night. . . ."

Joan's eyes blazed. "You are an evil woman," she said. "You have come here for an evil purpose. Besides ——"

She flung the cloak out fanlike across the bed. "This cloak has no clasp."

Dornia Eleutherios smiled a little scornful smile. "As though the woman who wore the cloak might not have removed the clasp. A snip of the scissors——" One exquisite gloved hand swept the sleek surface of the fur. "There would be no trace."

"And why would she do that?"

"Who can say? Perhaps the clasp was valuable. Perhaps it was given to her by some one she loved or who loved her." She paused a moment, studying Joan's face. "What you are remembering about me"—she half closed her eyes—"is that I was Marakoff's mistress. That is all past now. The only thing that matters now is that I love your brother."

Joan drew in her breath softly.

"You and I are two women loving one man," Dornia Eleutherios continued, "though so differently. We cannot afford to be enemies. It is because I love your brother that I tell you that cloak is dangerous. We have no time to lose. James Shackleton may come at any moment. I shall take the cloak. I shall destroy it."

Joan put her hand down swiftly on the golden stuff. "No, I shall keep the cloak myself."

"It would be well if you would listen to me. I tell you that cloak is dangerous."

"Dangerous for whom?" Joan said.

"Dangerous for your brother, and dangerous for the man on whose bed you found it. Perhaps dangerous for me, too. Your brother, Ned Shackleton, and I dined at Claridge's that night Marakoff was murdered. I was wearing a gold cloak. . . . You see?"

"I'm sorry," Joan said, stilly. "I'm afraid that I don't see. And I shall keep the cloak. I'm afraid there is nothing more to say."

Dornia Eleutherios accepted this. "Very well. But there is one thing I beg you to tell me. Do you know where they have gone?"

"And if I did know," said Joan, evenly, "would I tell you, do you think?"

"See here, my dear." Dornia Eleutherios's voice quivered a little. "This is much too serious a thing for you and me to cross swords over. It concerns the safety of those two men. I know West Africa as no one but Marakoff knew it. I was there with him several years. I know Ned Shackleton and your brother are going into Marakoff's country. But they would not tell me fully their plans. Lately I have had another dread. Tell me——" She broke off, swept a glance around, found what she wanted, took a box of matches from the table by the bed, opened it, and took out several. She stooped and laid the matches in a careful pattern on the bed.



"Does this sign mean anything to you?"

"Yes," said Joan, in a voice hardly more than audible. "It means death—or a certain valley in Africa. Ned Shackleton showed it to me."

"It means the Valley of Creeping Men. Do you know whether they have gone there?"

Joan waited a moment before replying. "I think so," she said. "I found that sign on my brother's bed the night before they went. I think Bimbi put it there to tell me where they

have gone. Yet, I think that is strange, too. Why shouldn't he have told me?"

Dornia shook her head.

"Bimbi is one of them. They never speak its name." Then her thought changed its direction. "The fools!" she said. "Don't they know? No one dares go into that valley. No one but Marakoff. And Marakoff is dead."

She paused and considered:

"If it becomes known that they are going into the valley, they may never get past Douala. If they are going into the Valley of Creeping Men, then I must go after them. They will have need of me."

She turned swiftly and, without another word, went out of the room. Her quick, light steps descended the stairs.

It was a moment before Joan Merrington could gather her own confused thoughts. Then she took her resolution swiftly. She would not wait for James Shackleton. What Dornia Eleutherios said was undoubtedly true. The cloak was dangerous. It must not be left there. She would take it; she would hide it. She folded the soft stuff into as small compass as possible, wrapped her scarf over it, left the room, and went quickly down the stairs.

A young man mounting the first flight drew back and flattened himself against the wall to let her pass. She scarcely saw him as, head erect and heart pounding in her breast, she went past him into the street.

The young man stood for a long moment looking after her.



Chapter Nine

THE GENTLEMAN FROM GRAYMOOR

HAWKINS was an impeccable butler. He knew how to adapt himself to any surrounding and circumstance. He had the facility, like the tree-toad, of assuming the colour of that upon which he rested. When he was in English territory, he called himself Brillat-Hawkins. He kept the French "Brillat" because it constituted, as it were, a gesture of reference and deference to his native country. When he returned to his native land, for much the same reason, but reversing the order, he signed the butcher and grocery receipts, or other household accounts, with a very spirited "Hawkins-Brillat," executed with as fine an upward flair as he could manage, in imitation of the distinguished and slanting signature of his mistress.

His wife, who had all the trimness and neatness of a bird, with none of a bird's anxiety, disregarded these fundamental variabilities of her husband and signed herself, on the rare occasions when her signature was needed, Thérèse Mallet, her maiden name. It had the advantage of freeing her from responsibility as to her husband, and was *chic* besides. When the stupid English of her own world (she always thought of them as stupid) addressed her as "Missus 'Awkins" she ignored them, and usually looked suddenly at something at a great distance, perhaps across the Channel. None of them liked her; and she liked it, and took it as flattery that they did not.

Hawkins and his wife possessed discretion as other people possess downrightness, or good or bad temper. It almost seemed you could have taken their *savoir-faire* in your hands, it was so real and so obvious.

Hawkins helped Lord Sleugh off with his coat, and stood holding it as though it were something inconceivably precious.

Lord Sleugh rubbed his hands slightly.

"Your mistress is expecting me." It was not a question; it was a rather cold announcement.

Hawkins answered with quick fervour, and a little forward bend of the body.

"Yes, m'lord."

He lifted Lord Sleugh's white silk scarf from about the Englishman's throat as though it had been wrought of the purest gold, placed it carefully and lovingly across the precious coat, pushed open the door of the drawing-room with his hand wide and flat, and his head drooped deferentially.

Lord Sleugh stood by the fireplace, and looked about him. Then he did precisely what he always did when he was left alone in that room, he allowed his glance to travel slowly and appreciatively and calculatingly from point to point, trying to determine just what charm or combination of charms it was that made it so distinctly the room not only of a particular type of woman, but of a particular woman.

He thought he would have known this room for hers among a thousand. Comfort and grace and distinction, an effect of great simplicity attained by a most careful use and disposition of objects of great elegance. The dovelike colour

of the walls and rugs seemed to vibrate in quiet undertones behind the high, pale, flame-coloured tone of a Chinese shawl, left seemingly carelessly on the deep divan. And the flame-colour of the shawl was answered as by a voice, by the flame-coloured vase on the mantel; and these two were, so to speak, set ringing by the magnificent lacquer cabinet of Chinese red, in one corner, which Lord Sleugh's observant eye had long since identified as the one that had once stood in the drawing-room of the Chinese ambassador.

While he was thinking of these things, and almost without a sound, Dornia Eleutherios was with him.

She watched him as he kissed her hand, then followed the slow, rather stately raising of his head, and met his eyes with her own very directly and gravely.

"You have come to talk of ——"

He put up a thin, arresting hand:

"No, I do not wish to talk of it at all. I came for another purpose."

When they were seated her hands lay in her lap. Her eyes went to them, and then to him.

"I have much to thank you for," she said, gently.

In the brief moment they had been together, Lord Sleugh had noted, as once or twice before he had noted, something that lay like a deepening of shadows across Dornia Eleutherios's loveliness. In another woman it would have been a look of tiredness, an evidence of strain, or exhaustion, or sleeplessness; in her it was rather an added beauty, a more exquisite delicacy, like that added to the new moon by the shadow of the unlighted part of the moon-world that defines and determines the crescent's brilliancy. There was a kind of

translucence about the perfect features now, as when a light shines behind alabaster.

Perhaps her most real power for Sleugh lay in this occasional shadowy delicacy almost amounting to melancholy that made her, instead of one of the most dangerously fascinating women in the world, one of the most dangerously appealing.

At such times Lord Sleugh became suddenly young. Icy channels thawed in him. Old feelings and emotions, long frozen in him by his wintry interests, flowed again. It did not matter to him at such times that this woman had been the tool, in a sense the victim, of Marakoff, that she had been perhaps the tool and victim of other men besides; but it mattered to him exquisitely that she was at such times a fascinating and appealing woman in need of protection, precisely the kind of protection that he felt himself fitted to give.

"Why should you thank me?" he said, keeping his eyes for a moment hungrily on her.

She raised her hand languidly and let it drop on the spot of brilliant flame-colour beside her.

"Oh, it is quite something to thank you for. But for you, this house would have been the first visited by the police, I think. Wouldn't it?"

"I thought," he said, a little acridly, "we were not going to talk of any of that."

"No? Well then, we will not," she agreed. Her eyelids dropped over her eyes haughtily. "Tell me—what is it you want of me today?"

Lord Sleugh looked into the fire a moment, arranging his words.

"I have come to ask a favour of you," he said, a cold light veiling his eyes.

"Yes?"

"Yes. I gave you once a clasp—a gold clasp."

She started very slightly, but the long yellow eyes did not flicker.

"Would you," he continued, "let me have it? Later it could be given back, if it seemed best."

"You are always guarding me," she said, gratefully, almost meekly. "But in this case, please be sure the clasp is safe. It was out of my possession for a short time."

"Ah!" broke in Lord Sleugh.

"But I have it now, in very safe keeping. I have a sentiment about it."

A slow warmth came into Lord Sleugh's eyes.

"And I have a deep sentiment about its wearer," he said, fixing a look full of meaning upon her. "But for that very reason I should prefer to disarm all danger."

"Is that why you wish it?"

She rose, and with a lovely gesture pulled the old-fashioned bell-rope.

He had risen when she did.

"To disarm all danger for you or for me?" she said.

She laid a lovely arm along the mantel and did not look at him.

Lord Sleugh flushed.

"For both of us," he said, quietly.

"Ah, how do I know!" she said, sweeping him a look under her long lashes and mocking him with a little melancholy smile. "To whom do you wish to give it? To some one more beautiful?"

"That would not be possible," he said, vividly aware, as he spoke, of every line of her beauty.

"It was during that time that we spent together at Graymoor that you gave it to me," Dornia said.

Lord Sleugh took the hand that hung by her side and carried it to his lips.

She turned and looked at the stiffly drooped grey head, and the square, severe shoulders bent in homage.

"That was a very happy week-end, was it not, *mon ami*?" she continued, languidly.

There was a slight sound in the hallway. Lord Sleugh released her hand. They seated themselves again.

Hawkins entered with the tea and served it as he always did with great gravity and exactness, as though the entire ceremony were being performed to slow music. Then he drew one after another the heavy curtains across the windows, left the room, and closed the door noiselessly.

When they had finished their tea, she sat a moment looking thoughtfully into the fire. Then she put her cup down on the tray, clasped her hands, and let them drop idly between her knees.

"*Mon ami*, I have something to propose to you."

He put his own cup down and folded his arms, and waited for her to speak.

"You want the clasp," she said. "I do not wish to give it to you. Is it not mine? Well, then, allow me my way. I understand that it would be safer for both of us if the clasp were not seen. Trust me. If it were seen, it might become a menace to you. I understand that. It might be ascertained that you gave it to me. But how could it possibly be a menace to you without being far more of a menace to me? In

protecting my own safety, do I not automatically protect yours as well? Is that not plain?"

Lord Sleugh watched her eyes that hardened somewhat.

"Come, *cher ami*"—she leaned and put a hand on his knee—"make an agreement with me. I shall keep the clasp, safely—oh, safely!—be sure of that—that I promise you. And you on your part will help me to leave London at once. I wish to leave quickly, very quickly. You will make it possible for me. You will see to those things, I mean, that are necessary, as one in your position can do. You will see that a passport is given me. It would be, I should think, even to your advantage to have me away from London. And I shall not even tell you where I am going. I shall simply go, and you will forget me"—she paused and smiled—"for a while, at least, and I shall carry you here, in my heart's remembrance."

As she spoke, a lost Sleugh, a Sleugh who had been lost in his young manhood amid a maze of sinister and worldly policies, and politics, and diplomacies, showed himself for a moment, looking out of Sleugh's eyes. And this Sleugh wanted to take this woman so worldly, so sophisticated, yet so young, in his arms. He wanted to shield her, and protect her, and fight the world for her. The blood ran warm in his veins, and his heart beat young and hard. But a moment later that Sleugh was gone; the grey Sleugh with the thin firm line between his lips was holding his coat open a trifle to take something from its inner pocket.

He rose and, leaning a little to the light, opened a black billfold and took from it a number of bank notes and laid them on the table.

"I shall do as you ask," he said. "And as a tribute of old friendship, you will allow me to leave these."

Later Brillat-Hawkins unfolded a five-pound note and gazed at it in amazement.

"Well," said Thérèse Mallet, "what are you gaping for?"

"But what I cannot make out is what it is for! Five shillings, yes! Even a pound!—but ——" He turned it over again.

"Idiot!" Thérèse said, indignantly, snatching it from him and examining it to make sure it was really what it appeared to be. "One would think you had been in the service of costermongers! This is the way a gentleman says, 'Remember that you did not see me.'"



Chapter Ten

IN THE PLAYHOUSE

JOAN MERRINGTON opened the door of the old playhouse that she and Frank and Derek had played in when they were children. It stood at the foot of the garden at Cranbrook. She stepped in and closed the door behind her softly and with a tense sense of relief.

Her interview with Dornia Eleutherios in Ned Shackleton's rooms and the finding of the cloak had greatly shaken her, and almost more still, Lord Sleugh's words of the night before.

The whole thing would have revolted her less if she could have believed that in trying to fasten the suspicion of the Marakoff murder on Ned Shackleton, Lord Sleugh's motive was a devotion to Frank. But she could believe no such thing. She believed that Lord Sleugh's desire to protect Frank at the expense of some one else was founded chiefly on his desire to protect himself, to guard his own name from being bandied about.

"Frank Merrington, Ward of Alexander Talbot, Lord Sleugh, Involved in the Marakoff Murder." Yes, that was no doubt the secret fear in Lord Sleugh's mind.

Joan had always looked upon Lord Sleugh in the light of a protector and guardian, and had depended on him. She had been fond of him, and was his favourite. But she knew now that her life from now on would be cut off from his. She felt somewhat as a just-launched lifeboat might feel that

finds itself cut off from the menacing ship that has until now carried it safely. She knew she could never again trust him and the older sophisticated world he represented; a world that was treacherous and self-seeking, with secret motives hid away in it like engines in deep ships; with insincerities like leaks along the seams, with dangerous purposes, shifting, like badly stowed cargoes; with hidden selfishness like the wretched rat-ridden places in old hulls.

So it seemed to her all her old trusts and dependabilities had been swept away.

But at least Dornia Eleutherios had not tricked her. She felt sure the gold cloak belonged to Dornia Eleutherios. That was why it had become a precious possession to Joan, a thing that she must keep and guard. Some day, with what she now knew, she believed it might serve to fasten guilt on the right person, Dornia Eleutherios, perhaps. She believed it might some day serve not as a menace, but as a defence of the two men whom she believed Dornia Eleutherios was trying to drag into her toils.

She had determined to hide it at Cranbrook, but on her way home had decided against taking it to the house. She might meet Aunt Leila, or Toppins, or Derek before she had time to put the cloak away. Instead, she would hide it for the night in the old playhouse at the foot of the garden. The next morning she would take it to James Shackleton and tell him everything. Instead of taking a taxi at the station, she walked, as she often did. She did not go so far as the large gateway of Cranbrook. She went in at the lower one instead, and up the long driveway skirting the garden.

Once she stopped. In the dusk, amounting almost to dark,

it seemed to her that she apprehended rather than heard something moving at a distance behind her.

She turned.

Nothing.

Of course! Nothing!

A moment later, when she had almost reached the playhouse and as her glance swept around, she thought she saw something moving in the dark shadows of the group of Norway pines standing just at the curve of the driveway; something stooping, and only a trifle darker than the shadows. It might have been one of the great boughs moving in the wind, only, there was no wind.

The next moment she had rounded the curve of the driveway, and there was a wind, that blew against her, blessedly reassuring.

Then it *was* the wind!

She hurried on now. Only a few steps across the gravel and there was the little house. The footsteps that had seemed to follow her, the bent form in the shadows, were only creations of her own overkeen senses.

Closing the door of the playhouse behind her, she felt almost automatically for a lock or bolt under the knob, only to remember that there never had been one there.

The little low-roofed house with its green shutters had been originally a garden tool-house. But when the late Lord Merrington had returned from Africa soon after Lady Merrington's death there, bringing his three children, Joan the eldest, then only seven, Toppins, Lady Merrington's maid, and his own African body servant, Bimbi, Miss Leila Merrington, taking charge of his household, had suggested to him that another, smaller tool-house might be built, and this

one might be advantageously turned into a playhouse for the children.

Here, Toppins, in whose charge they then were, could watch over them to her careful heart's content. Here they could be free—as formality forbade at Cranbrook House itself—to romp and play as they pleased.

So during many sunny and rainy hours the little house had been the dearest spot at Cranbrook to the children; dear to Toppins, too, as her special province, where her word was law. It had been the delight of Bimbi as well.

For the children dragged Bimbi to the playhouse just as often as his house duties would allow, crowded around him, and begged him to tell them stories of Africa.

And Bimbi would tell them about everything—about African kings and their black subjects; about African hunters, and runners, and skimmers, and boatmen; about men who made drums out of sections of hollow log, and some who made them out of calabashes, the tops covered with python skin. He made them a wonderful little tom-tom once himself, and beat upon it.

“What’s a python, Bimbi?”

And Bimbi showed white teeth in a smile, and wriggled his body as though it had a thousand joints, and in such a way that they knew perfectly well what a python was.

Then stories of hunts, leopards, lions, hippopotami. And once when Toppins was not there to stop him, tales of the torments the natives sometimes practised on their captives.

There were stories, too, of the animals themselves, and of the strange spirits that sometimes lived in them. Best of all, stories of exactly what each animal could do or say, and the cries and sounds they made.

He would squat on his haunches over an imaginary fire, warm his hands, then stoop lower, listening as though to some sound far off.

Then suddenly he would give the call of a night bird or animal—the flute-like call of the jungle owl just before its soft-feathered flight; the soft, yet loud *purr-purr* of the crouching leopard, followed by its whine; the far-off crow of a cock; and if he meant their blood to run cold, the terrible staccato laugh of a hyena.

Then the children would fly shrieking with terror and delight to Toppins, Derek, only a baby, screaming at the top of his voice, and Joan and Frank, from the safety of Toppins' arms, would call, shrilly:

"Do it again, Bimbi! Do it again!"

Far enough now, all that safety and delight! She remembered with a sort of pity now Bimbi's old pet name for her, "Little Spear." The years had brought the usual changes. As the children grew up, Bimbi had been more and more tied to his duties at the big house, and Toppins growing grey under her maid's cap, and, like somebody under an enchantment, was losing little by little, and year by year, her authority and plenary powers over the children, until at last it was no longer they who obeyed Toppins, but Toppins who obeyed their least word, even anxiously.

The years, the years! How they change things! And now! Poor old Bimbi! Caught perhaps in the tangled meshes of Frank's reckless and troubled life. And Frank himself!—No! She would not let herself think of that!

But those children! Think of those three children that they used to be! It was almost as though they were lurking there in the dark corner of the old playhouse—the child

Joan in her dark-blue Peter Robinson suit and her curls caught at the side with a bow, watching her with wide eyes, looking out wonderingly at this different Joan, this grown-up Joan with her crisp purpose and silent determination; this Joan who had come not to play with them, but had come instead, on a strange, grown-up errand; this slender, tall, grown-up Joan, with a grown-up cloak of gold over her arm.

She almost wanted to wave a hand to them. She wanted to say: "Don't be afraid of me! Love me! I need you! Things have changed so!"

Things had changed so!

Heavens, yes! That was what they couldn't understand! That was what astonished them! That was what troubled them!

She wanted to say, "Don't grow up! You'll be sorry! Stay little, my darlings!"

She turned to the long tool-chest where they used to keep their toys. She would put the cloak there for the night.

The children stared. What was she doing, opening the toy-chest! Would she put the gold cloak in it?

At that moment, and so present and real that it might have been a hand that touched her in the darkness, came the soft, pleading note of a night bird.

Her heart stopped and plunged on.

It occurred to her that if any danger should come to her in that lonely place, and if she screamed out, no one would hear.

She stood with one closed hand against her lips.

The night bird's mournful note came again.

Could it be Bimbi? Could it be that Bimbi had not gone to Africa with Frank, after all?

Again, and a little closer. The bird had flown to a nearer branch.

Then, strangely there came the far-off crowing of a cock. She remembered an old gardener they used to have who said it was unlucky for a cock to crow at night.

What strange things one remembers!

Then, her heart froze. Just outside the door there was the soft rasping purr of a leopard.

Dead silence.

She stood with her face away from the door, but every fibre of her listening in its direction. Bimbi!

She swung around, took two steps to the door, and opened it. Her heart was in her voice.

"Bimbi! It's Joan!"

The dark form, scarcely discernible in the darkness, came crouching low at her feet.

It seemed to her by the way he crouched that he must have done some terrible thing.

She stooped and laid her hand on his head.

"Bimbi! What's wrong? Never mind! I'll help!"

The woolly head was put back sharply until the face was under her palm.

She drew away a horrified hand, while the figure rose, like something that rises from the inside of the earth—tall, tall, tall! Too tall!

Not Bimbi!

She caught at the table against the wall, and steadied herself with her hand.

The dark figure put his hand on the table also, and leaned toward her.

"Don't scream! If you do I will kill you before anyone can come."

They stood hours it seemed, facing each other in the dark. She shrank away from him as far as the table would allow, and put her hands on her breast.

The black form reached and closed his hands like iron over hers.

"I want to know. I only want to know."

She drew a long, sharp breath.

"What?"

"I want to know"—the man's voice was soft; his words were like black stones slipped carefully into a black pool—"I want to know where they have taken the Yellow One." He brought his mouth almost against her ear. "Where have they hid Marakoff's ape?"

"I don't know," Joan said, sharply. "I don't know anything about it."

"Listen," he said, keeping his iron grip on her hands. "I am Kanaka. I took care of the ape. They think I have hidden it. They tell me I must find it. I said you would know. You know the Lesser One. Your brother went away with him."

"The Lesser One?"

"Yes. Marakoff was the Great One. This man talked with Marakoff that night. He is the Lesser One. He knows."

She said nothing, only swayed away from him a little.

"Tell me quickly," he said. "They are coming."

Before she could answer, the door was burst open. She sensed rather than saw four black forms. Then, suddenly, they were revealed to her. One of them flashed on a small flashlight. The light fell first in a straight stream on the

gold cloak. It had fallen and lay at her feet like a pool of gold.

One of them caught it up, twisted it into a fold, and wrapped it with two gestures about her face so that she could not cry out. Another took her wrists and bound them swiftly behind her. The light snapped out.

Then they hurried her away.

She could feel the gravel under her feet.

Only a short distance beyond the pines and the curve of the road, a motor waited.

One of the men commanded her to step into it. They all followed.

The last she remembered was that some one reached across her and banged its door.

In the playhouse the three children she had imagined, stared.



Chapter Eleven

THEY

DARKNESS first, as it was in the beginning, then, slowly taking form out of the darkness, light—a very little, feeble sun. It hung directly over her eyes—a gas flame turned low.

All around was the darkness, thick, stifling, foetid. Out of it shapes of things emerged, slowly—a cloak's face, without hands, the corner of a wardrobe, the pale square of a window tightly shuttered on the outside, but still lighter than the wall. Something was moving in the darkness. Or was it the darkness itself that took shape—the shape of a woman? She had her back turned—she was bending over, stirring something in a pan over a gas-ring.

Joan Merrington was lying on a rude couch. Her hands were no longer bound. She put one hand up to her throat and her fingers brushed against something soft and silken—the gold cloak.

Then in a rushing stream of fully awakened consciousness everything came back to her—the gigantic figure looming out of the darkness of the playhouse, those other menacing forms crowding around her, pinioning her arms, the cloak which she had gone to hide twisted about her face, stifling her screams, smothering her in its treacherous folds. The rush over the lawn to the motor, then the finality of the slam of the door and the car's quick leap forward, before a merciful unconsciousness overcame her.

And now—this.

She stirred uneasily. The woman turned from her cooking. She lifted her head over her shoulder and looked at Joan—a heavy, scowling black face.

"So you are awake, eh?" she said.

"Where am I?"

Joan struggled to rise.

"Safe enough." The black woman came forward into the circle of gaslight. She was fat and monstrous, like something out of an evil dream.

"And you'll stay there, too, till you tell us what we want to know."

She rested both hands on her knees and leaned forward over the girl on the couch. She brought her face down close to Joan's.

"Where have they hidden the Yellow One?"

Joan shrank from her into the folds of the cloak. "The Yellow One"—that was what Kanaka had asked her there in the playhouse. She shook her head violently.

"I don't know what you mean. I don't know anything about the ape. I told Kanaka. You must let me go."

"You will remember."

When the woman spoke like that it was like the purring of a great cat, drawing in its claws and letting them out again, slowly narrowing its eyes to slits and opening them again, savouring in advance the final spring.

"No harm will come to you if you tell us. If you do not tell us"—those strangely dilating eyes held hers—"if you do not tell us, THEY will kill you."

That, too, was like something Kanaka had said! THEY wanted the ape. If he did not find it and bring it to them,

THEY would kill him. But Kanaka was one of them. He had helped to bring her here.

"What good would it do you to kill me?" Joan said, very quietly. "I tell you I know nothing about the ape. You would only bring trouble on yourself. The police ——"

"Pah!" a snarl crept into the black woman's voice. "Do you think the followers of the Yellow One care anything for the white man's laws? THEY serve the Yellow One. The Yellow One's arm is very long. He protects his own. His enemies he kills."

She clenched her fists and used them, first one, then the other, bending over the girl on the couch, not so much threatening her as to beat the measure of her own triumphal chanting.

"There was the Great One. He brought the Yellow One to London. When THEY went in the dawn to see him, the door was open. But the Great One was dead, and the little black god was beside him."

Her voice, rising with each statement, paused on the full note of triumph; then it dropped.

"But the Yellow One was gone. Some one had taken it—some one who was there that night."

Suddenly she brought her face down low between her shoulders and close to Joan.

"Tell me, white girl, where have they hidden it?"

"I don't know, I tell you. I don't know."

The woman turned from her with a sidewise twist of her great clumsy body.

"You will know when THEY come," she said. The thick lips gave vent to a horrible chuckling laugh.

She went back to the gas-ring and turned out the flame. Then she took up the pan and went with it toward the door.

"THEY will come soon now, very soon—in less than an hour."

She went out, shutting and locking the door behind her.

Joan sprang to her feet and made a quick investigation of the room. It was used, evidently, for a kind of storeroom, for heavy boxes and bales covered with straw matting stood at one end. There was the broken couch on which she had been lying, a tall wardrobe, some odds and ends of furniture piled in one corner, the table with the gas-ring, and a pile of unwashed plates. The one window was closed and shuttered tightly.

She threw up the glass sash and struggled to open the heavy wooden shutters. But they were bolted on the outside and, for all her efforts, remained as immovable as a wall.

She seemed suddenly to hear the black woman's horrible chuckling laugh, to see her evil face leering at her triumphantly out of the darkness.

Was there nothing for it, then—nothing but to wait with what courage she could command until THEY came?

She had no idea where she was, whether in London, in some smaller city, or perhaps in an isolated country house where her cries would never be heard. She had no recollection of how far THEY had driven her, or the direction the car had taken when it swung out of the gates of Cranbrook. She could not tell what time it was, for her watch had stopped. The hands pointed to half past five. It was about that time, she figured, that the men had surrounded her in the playhouse and taken her captive.

When would THEY return?

There was no doubt in her mind that THEY represented one of the secret African blood brotherhoods of which white men, even those who had lived long in Africa, knew little or nothing. Lord Sleugh had spoken of them to Derek when the Marakoff murder was first discussed.

The brotherhood—the followers of the Yellow One—as the loathsome black woman called them, had vowed vengeance on Marakoff for his capture of the ape. They had plotted to kill him. Only, some one else had been before them, some one else had killed Marakoff.

And the ape was gone. And THEY wanted the ape.

She grew confused.

How soon would THEY come?

The stories Bimbi used to tell, lowering his voice so that Toppins should not hear, and stopping now and again to cast anxious glances over his shoulder—stories of torture, stories of devil men who could project their spirits into the forms of animals to attack their enemies! She had hated Bimbi's stories, and feared them. But she had listened, clenching her fists tight so as not to scream. They came back to her now with ghastly significance.

Suddenly she flung back her head, every nerve taut, listening. A faint scratching sound. Then the sound came again, louder this time.

Something was at the window, drawing back the bolts of the shutters.



Chapter Twelve

SPICES AND ESSENTIAL OILS

"TELL me your name again," said Joan.

"Yes, miss, Caleb Lipsey, Spices and Essential Oils. That's it, miss."

They had come through darkness and uncertainly across the roofs, and were safe now in the little room back of his shop. He looked more than ever like a bent, pleasant-faced old raven, hopping about to wait upon her, and bringing her something warm to drink, pure solicitude beaming through his anxious spectacles.

While she drank, he took the most respectful liberty of putting a little brown blanket from the bottom of his bed across her feet. Then he flew—hopped—to the door, and unhooked from it his new long alpaca coat, brought it, and, spreading his feet apart a little so as not to come too near to her, leaned over and, with a reverent care, dropped it about her, this in place of the gold cloak. She had lifted her shoulder and withdrawn with a little look of horror when he had offered to put that about her.

"I can't wonder at all, miss, that you were terrified at my drawing the bolt of that shutter and at my scratching at the window. But I thought there was no time to lose. From the time I saw them from that little peephole window of mine up yonder, from which I've watched not a few of their strange wickednesses; from the time I caught a glimpse of them bringing you in until I saw one of them get out on the roof

from another window and lock the shutters—I said, ‘I’ll go!’”

She put up a white hand. Her eyes pleaded.

“That’s right, too, miss. I won’t talk of it any more. You’ll be safe now, for I went to look, and they’re all drunk. Everything is tight here. And when I go I’ll come back as quick as ever I can, that I will. And I’ll telephone Mr. James Shackleton, just as you said, and I’ll wait for him to come, and I’ll meet him and bring him up here.

“We can go as tidy as you like through the house next door, as I told you, and up over the roof and down. Very fortunate that is! Very fortunate I call it that there’s but that one roof scuttle for the two houses. Then Mr. James Shackleton and I will come, and you’ll let us in. Like a password I’ll say, ‘Caleb Lipsey, Spices and Essential Oils.’ So you’ve only to keep your courage up for a little while. And if he weren’t there, then you and I would get away by that same fortunate scuttle, miss. But I think he will be there, no doubt.”

Trouble sat in the deep wrinkles of his forehead under his skull-cap, and in the deep kindness of his eyes, but anyone not too closely involved in the adventure might have seen, too, that he was getting his own kind of pleasure out of it all. Years of handling things that came to him from remote and never-to-be-seen places had cultivated his imagination and a liking for romance, and here, so to speak, in his hands there were put new and rare spices, pungent and far-brought essences, that he had never thought to possess—the mere sight of a beautiful girl like that sitting in his little drab room, for instance, and he miraculously her rescuer and benefactor!

"They'd never think, I'm certain, to look over here," he babbled on. "You see, I've always lived very peaceable with them, very civil; the rent's low here, and it's worth saving a penny. Besides, as I've told you, I've let them help me in the shop from time to time, and I once gave one of them a pinch of coriander for the old woman's heathen doings. It was friendship bought at a very little price, and no doubt they think I'm quite harmless, being old. That's like the young—and the villainous.

"But what's our greatest safety"—he poked several little holes in the air with his first finger and lowered his voice to a whisper—"is that they're great believers in witchcraft. When they find you gone, and that shutter still bolted from the outside, it's my belief their first thought will be witchcraft.

"Well, witchcraft's everything to them, you see. To the man, Bakai, now, the one I told you about, with the red tattoo on his cheek, it's different. He's far craftier than the rest. But, as I told you, he's been gone several days, now. As I told you, I do blame myself very much now for letting him be in the back shop when Mr. Shackleton was talking to me that day. But you see, I never thought. Well, I think Bakai might think the drug I told you about, that I sold Mr. Shackleton, was not for apes in the jungle, but for putting Marakoff's yellow ape to sleep. But it's my opinion that the rest of the blacks, when they find you are gone, are likely to skip over all that. They'll just think spirits spirited you away. You see, they think the Yellow One is a powerful spirit. An ugly name, that! It sounds like a kind of devil! That's what they mean, I think, by the 'Great One' and the

'Lesser One.' The Great Spirit, I make no doubt, was Dr. Marakoff, and the Lesser One—you see? So they'll think some spirit—maybe Dr. Marakoff himself—came and spirited you away.

It seemed to her she could not endure another word of his terrible garrulousness, nor the anxious, kind, old bend of his head, though these things made up at that moment the sum of her only comfort.

Later, she could remember nothing of what happened during Caleb Lipsey's absence, while she waited alone in the dark room for him to bring James Shackleton to her. The mind has its own self-protective measures, its sound safety devices for forgetting.

What she remembered was the sense of rescue and security that she felt as the taxi, unguessing, went indifferently, like any other taxi, through lighted London streets; and she lay back relaxed, hardly conscious of anything save security, the security of feeling her head against the arm of James Shackleton as he supported her, and once, when she opened her eyes for an instant, the reassuring vision of that kind old raven, Caleb Lipsey, on the opposite seat, still leaning a little, holding the gold cloak over his arm and watching her with all the solicitude in the world.

What she remembered, too, and would remember all her life, was the peace, the utter peace and security at last, of James Shackleton's rooms, where she lay upon the couch.

James Shackleton begged her to rest, urged her not to talk. But feverishly she wanted to talk. A bright flame-colour came into her white cheeks and stayed there.

She told him everything: her interview with Dornia Eleu-

therios, with Lord Sleugh; her tormented effort to piece together the possible happenings of that night of the Marakoff murder; poured out everything to him—youth to youth.

And he listened, absorbed, to everything.

Sometimes he turned his sensitive face and grave eyes to the fire, as though to pursue there some of the things she told him. Sometimes, with long, sensitive, slow fingers, he turned an opal ring on his hand. She had the impression that his hands were thinking, thinking as his mind was, how to help her.

In such moments she searched his face longingly for likenesses to his brother. Yes, and saw them, too. Yet they perpetually eluded her. Just when she thought the similarity lay in the eyes and the fine line of the cheek, it seemed to her not so much there, perhaps, as in the tones of the voice.

The face was more slender, more delicate. The hair, sweeping back from the fine forehead, was even heavier, softer, a little more gracious. Instead of the directness and determination of the other's face, there was here something remote, withdrawn, that she could not follow, like the remoteness sometimes seen in children who are not sure that you will understand them; who look out at you from an inner world of their own creating; the remoteness of people who think in poetry, though for purposes of communication they must speak in prose. It was he, she knew now, who had stood so straight against the wall to let her pass that day on the stairs.

She felt, too, a definite pleasure in their suddenly established relationship; a definite safety in talking to the brother of the man she loved. Love was a glorious thing; but there

was something beautiful, too, in a relationship founded on the certainty that it claims nothing, will ask nothing, yet is ready to give all that it can—service, devotion, understanding.

It was when she spoke of her belief that Dornia Eleutherios loved his brother, when she told James Shackleton that Dornia Eleutherios was going to Africa, not, she believed, to protect these two men, as she had asserted, but for her own purposes, that he seemed most interested.

"But after what happened tonight," he said, "I can't help thinking she may be very right about their needing protection against the natives. Besides, you told me she said she loved your brother. She couldn't love your brother and my brother both."

Joan explained that to him, too. She was sure Dornia Eleutherios only pretended to love her brother so as to get from him what she wanted of him. It was true that at home they had never believed much in his schemes. She confessed she herself had not sympathized with Frank's dream of finding vast wealth in Africa. But no doubt Dornia Eleutherios had sympathized readily enough, meaning, if that wealth were there, to have her share of it.

"Isn't love of money and dependence upon money the very secret soul of such women?"

Besides—who could say?—Dornia Eleutherios had said that she knew Africa as only Marakoff knew it. Perhaps she knew the Valley. Perhaps she knew there was vast wealth there, locked up, as Frank had said. And perhaps she believed, as Frank himself believed, that the secret formula he possessed was the only key in the world to unlock that wealth.

James Shackleton thought of this a long time. She was so convincing. She made it all seem so reasonable.

Then finally, and it was as though all the rest had been only steps up to this, she told him of her determination. Yesterday, as she hurried away from Ned Shackleton's rooms and from her interview with Dornia Eleutherios, it had been only a possibility, but in the train that afternoon, on the way home, it had grown into a need, and a certainty, and now it was a necessity. Nothing could stop her now. She, herself, was going to Africa.

James Shackleton was in a kind of despair at this. What in the world could she do there?

"I would go to them. I could tell them. I could warn them against Dornia Eleutherios, against Lord Sleugh. I could see Lord Sleugh again, myself. I could make everything clear to him."

That seemed to him a bad move.

"As I see it, you would anger your brother if he cares for Dornia Eleutherios, or if she has influence over him. You might anger my brother, too—I don't know as to that. But it is practically certain that by letting him know Lord Sleugh's plan to fasten suspicion on him you might break up the confidence and peace of mind that he needs for his work. His whole expedition might go to pieces."

Then he explained all this further. He understood better, perhaps, than she could, what such a loss would mean to his brother, who was probably staking every hope he had on the success of his work in Africa. Of course, if there were hope of turning Lord Sleugh aside, that was a different matter.

Well, she believed there was hope. At any rate, she was

going. She must. She would agree not to tell her brother or Ned Shackleton why she had come, nor let them know any of her anxiety. She would let them suppose she had followed them merely for adventure. Plenty of women did that sort of thing nowadays. Besides, Frank had always said she was wilful. She could count on his being hardly surprised, when he at last knew she was in Africa.

Still, it seemed to James Shackleton a wild scheme, and he tried to dissuade her. She did not know that country. They, Ned and Frank, would have left Douala and gone up-river. How could she find them?

"I had supposed you could tell me that," she said. "Don't you know? Don't you know just where they've gone?"

No, he admitted he didn't. His brother was secretive. Scientists often were. He didn't blame him for that, when there was so much at stake.

But that did not balk her, either.

She told him of the little map Ned Shackleton had made for her that day at the Savoy.

He sat looking a long while in the fire.

"What are you thinking?" she said at last, miserably. "Are you thinking it's a perfectly wild thing for me to go?"

He nodded slowly.

"Yes, I am. I was thinking that I wish you'd promise me you wouldn't attempt it. Will you?"

She shook her head.

"I can't. I'm going."

He got up and looked down into the glowing coals.

"Well, then, there's only one thing to be done. I can't let you go alone."

She could have wept for sheer relief and joy.

"You mean you'll go! You mean you'll go with me!"

It seemed to her that all the comfort in the world was there in the room with her.

They talked for a long time after that. She had an answer for his every doubt. It would be easy. She had plenty of money for every need. They could fly first to Paris; and there rent a plane to take them to Douala, as Ned and Frank had done. From Paris, she would write Derek and get him to break the news to Aunt Leila. There would be time to arrange everything comfortably before they left England. Since Lord Sleugh was going by boat, they would still arrive in Douala ahead of him. Once there, she could go up to the stockade, if that seemed best, and he could wait in Douala or at Yoko. She agreed with him that their chief care must be to avoid Dornia Eleutherios, not to let her know.

When the bells of St. Lucien's struck two he rose.

"It's wicked of me, after all you've been through, to allow you to talk so long. Old Lipsey's asleep up in Ned's room long ago. I'll go up myself and leave you. You must be exhausted."

"Yes, I am pretty tired," she admitted, with a white smile, and put her head back among the pillows and closed her eyes. Almost at the same moment a little still look of deep sleep came across her face.

He stood a moment watching her, to be sure that she slept.

He had meant to show her how to lock the door after he left; had meant to tell her that he would be ready, at any sound, to come to her if she was afraid.

But she was sleeping so deeply now, it would be best not to disturb her.

He took the blankets from his own bed. With the greatest care he put them over her.

She did not stir.

The long lashes seemed sealed against the delicate shadows under her eyes.

He looked about to see that everything was as it should be, snapped out the lights, closed the door after him, stood listening a moment, and went upstairs.

But he did not go to bed. A half an hour later he came down the steps again, knocked gently, and, receiving no answer, opened the door softly.

He turned on one of the side lights.

She was lying exactly as he had left her. Her hand lay just as it had lain—with the heaviness of utter fatigue and deep sleep.

He seated himself in the chair where he had been seated before, near to her, and bent to look at her.

How slender! How helpless! How utterly still she was, and how beautiful! He thought he had never seen, never would see again, anyone so beautiful.

Suddenly he put his elbows on his knees and hid his face in his hands, and remained so a long time. It was as though he might have been shutting out the too great beauty and brightness and stillness of her.

Then he rose at last, turned, without looking at her again, put out the light, left the room, closing the door with great care and softness, and went up to his brother's room.

Poor old Caleb Lipsey, with his head far back on his

pillow and one arm flung wide, like a bird plucked of its feathers, was snoring away softly.

James Shackleton flung himself on his brother's couch, put his arm over his eyes, but did not sleep. At intervals the bells of St. Lucien's rang the hours.



Chapter Thirteen

TWO MEN IN AFRICA

EVERY coast town along "the Ivory" has its Hôtel de France. That at Douala is no exception to the rule. A ramshackle, ant-infested caravansary with sagging, unpainted balconies and long, dank corridors through which the beat and retreat of the surf breaking on the curve of beach beyond the fringe of leaning coco-nut palms, resounds mournfully by day and by night.

Its veranda is usually deserted. What guests it boasts—and these are not many—have a way of preferring the more cozy precincts of Madame Martin's at the opposite end of the parade.

A landmark of "the Ivory" is Madame Martin. A high, tight-bosomed daughter of Lyons with a coiffure seemingly made of black iron, so impervious is it to the equatorial heat and damp, and a smile which remains fixed on her lips and leaves the beady, black eyes as coldly calculating as the eyes of the Evilis' snake god in the pow-wow house at Samba.

"They'll be marking her on the charts next," Captain Benny Southard of the *Emeline* averred. "The old harpy's been selling bad rum and worse absinthe to sailormen since before I came down the West Coast. When I made port at Douala first—thirty-three years ago it is—she was there in the same berth, flying all her signals."

The mate spat disdainfully.

"But only to Europeans, Cap'n. Don't forget that. The

madame makes a great point of it. Her place, she'd have you know, is damned respectable! A full house, and not a black card in the deck."

"Except that Miette of hers."

"The high yellow." The mate drooped one eyelid suggestively. "Miette's only half black—the half that don't show, except when she's roused. I've heard it said she's the daughter of old Carstensen. You remember him—that was second mate of the *Bonny Bess*?"

"Like enough."

The Captain turned away discouragingly. He was a proper married man with a wife and three children in one of the neat little bungalows at the base of Table Mountain, and a pew in the leading Methodist chapel at Capetown.

Frank Merrington, stretched full length on a bamboo chair on Madame Martin's balcony, lifted his glass, and tilted his sun helmet further over his eyes. The steaming, breathless hotness penetrated every fibre of his being; that and the native palm wine that one drank in the vain hope of coolness to follow. It made even thinking difficult.

It had been a fortnight of extraordinary experiences. As he stared over the balcony railing to the dusty, sun-baked parade that even the natives had deserted at that hour, he began to doubt afresh his identity with the sophisticated, rather commonplace young man who had left England two short weeks before. He found himself here now, outwardly the same, yet within there was a readjustment of forces and values that at times amazed him. They had stopped in Paris only long enough to engage a pilot and a Fokker plane capable of carrying four passengers. They had winged south-

ward over the Pyrenees. Spain had unrolled below them like a burnt, brown blanket from which Gibraltar thrust a grisly, frowning head. Then the straits and the smell of the desert on the wind; Tangier, Rabat, and Marakesch, the last a blur of white domes and minarets, crouched under the lee of Mt. Atlas.

They changed planes at Marakesch. A wire from Paris had insured one being in readiness. Then on again, over the vast ocean of the Sahara. The pitiless sun overhead, the blazing sands below. Once, swooping low, they passed a long line of camels, each one mated to a grotesque shadow camel which seemed, however, no more unreal than the beast it stalked beside. "The salt caravan out of Timbuctoo," the pilot shouted over his shoulder. Then the Niger, writhing its sluggish length like a great snake out of the jungle into the desert and back again, and Timbuctoo caught in its coils.

Islam and the Bush rubbed elbows in those blind walled streets. The music of the dance-halls, the cries of the dancing girls, echoed a savagery older than Mahoud. The scorching *harmattan* blowing in from the desert filled one's lungs and eyes with fine, choking, golden dust.

"After the *harmattan* the rains will come," Ned Shackleton said out of the wisdom of many years in the tropics.

They halted in Timbuctoo three days while the plane was gone over against the final and more dangerous stretch of the journey. Then they turned south again. Over the Sudan the heat rose in long, quivering waves that, flying low, scorched one's face and blistered the aluminum paint on the Fokker's cockpit. They came down that night at a desert fort where a rotund little major of Zouaves welcomed them with joy. He sat beside their hammocks in his pyjamas and

plied them with questions of the boulevards. And he waved them off in the cool hour before the red dawn, a straight and gallant little figure beside the staff from which fluttered the Tricolour.

Toward noon that day there came a new freshness in the air—a welcome moisture. The desert gave place to dark stretches of jungle, a steaming, impenetrable tangle of rank growth. Once they swooped low over the surface of a wide, still lagoon. Its waters teemed with exotic water fowl—white herons and ibises, and heavy pelicans. The air was full of their startled screams and the whirring of a thousand wings. Later, the gigantic mountain peaks of the Kameeroons came into view. From a tall brown cone floated a lazy streamer of smoke. Then at sunset, a crescent of golden beach, the thunder of surf under tossing coco-nut palms, a huddle of white houses of Europeans in a crowding of native grass huts—Douala.

Upon their arrival there, Ned Shackleton had busied himself immediately in preparations for the trip up-river. The supplies shipped from England had not yet arrived. Their final stage of the journey had to be put off until these should come. Meanwhile, he spent hours in the closely shuttered backroom of M. Forrestier's bank. He kept unexplained trysts with gigantic naked black men along the waterfront. He sat for a day in a noisome grass hut in the native quarter and listened to the ramblings of a blind old man, toothless and shriveled now, but once the mightiest gorilla-hunter of the Bantus. His mood alternated between an intense energy which even the climate could not quench, and a chafing against the enforced delay.

To Frank, watching him secretly and turning many things

in his mind, Ned Shackleton had seemed from the moment of Marakoff's death to have become possessed of an indomitable will, a will which knew neither respite nor exhaustion, and which recognized only one necessity—to reach the Valley.

Now the thought of that energy driving on, sublimely superior to the horrors of the tropical heat, gave Frank a feeling of inadequacy. He sighed heavily.

There was a light tinkling sound. A girl parted the bead curtains at a door behind him, and stepped out on the balcony. She stood a moment looking down at the recumbent Englishman, then dropped cross-legged on the grass mat at his feet.

Frank looked at her through lowered eyelids. He did not speak. Presently she lifted the calabash from the floor and refilled his glass. He drank. She moved closer, edging her shoulder under his drooping hand. From the straight fall of orange cotton cloth that served her for a garment her copper-coloured arms and shoulders rose suave and lovely as a flower bud from its calyx. Frank touched idly the heavy copper necklace about her throat, lifted the shining hoop hanging from her ear. She swept him a sidewise glance from under lowered lashes.

“You lak me?”

“Ra-ther. You're a tidy baggage, Miette.”

She sighed. Her hand stole to his knee.

“Take me with you,” she whispered. “I very good girl. You see.”

From the curtained doorway behind them sounded a long, throaty snore.

"Away from ——?" He pointed to the direction whence the snore proceeded. Miette's lip curled disdainfully.

"Cochon!"

Frank grinned. She caught his hand between both of hers. "You will take me, then? When you go up-river?"

"You wouldn't go where I am going."

"I would. Anywhere. Even into the big pow-wow house at Samba."

"But not into ——" He broke off, remembering Ned Shackleton's warning, "No one must know exactly where we are going. No one must know about the Valley." The lives of the two of them would not be safe an hour if the natives were to find out whither the expedition was headed. The Valley was sacred. No one had dared to enter it but Marakoff.

The slim golden-hued fingers tightened about his own. They were like the tendrils of a jungle vine, holding him fast in infrangible meshes. "Where are you going? Tell me."

He shook his head. That was the worst of these native drinks; they played the devil with a fellow. In another second he would have given it away. He set his glass down and with his free hand disengaged the other from her grasp. But she held fast to his knee. "You shall not go!"

He plunged both hands into his pockets, and dropped idly a shower of bronze francs into her lap. She shook them from her.

"Mon Dieu! Do you call that money?"

He laughed shortly. "You women are all alike. Sisters under the skin! But wait, Miette. Let me go now, and I promise you in a few months I'll come back and pour a stream of gold into your lap." He tweaked her ear. "I'll

hang a pair of diamonds here, big as gooseberries. They'll light the way to your lips."

Her anger, always short-lived, changed to a childish delight. She clapped her hands. He took the opportunity to slide out of the chair and, laughing at her discomfiture, went, swaying a little and uncertainly, down the steps.

The girl stood staring after him, frowning darkly. Her bare foot beat an impatient tattoo on the balcony floor.

A heavy freckled hand covered with coarse reddish hairs parted the bead curtains, and a man staggered out on the balcony. He yawned widely and rubbed his eyes. About one thick wrist, strange symbol of Africa, he wore a broad silver bracelet.

"Who's your friend?"

Miette shrugged. "An *imbécile* of an Englishman!"

The man grinned.

"Wouldn't stay and play with you, *hein*?"

"He goes up-river, hunting gold."

The small eyes set in the broad, heavily-fleshed face narrowed. His gaze focussed on the white-clad figure crossing the courtyard below.

"So it is gold, *hein*?" he said, slowly. "You are sure of that, Miette?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" the girl threw wide her hands in a gesture of supreme exasperation. "Did not he say that in a few months he would return and cover me with gold? Does a woman make a mistake about a thing like that?"

Frank, emerging into the glare of the dusty parade, was joined by a dark shadow which detached itself from the balcony's shade and fell into step behind him—Bimbi.

Ever since that night of the storm he had shadowed Frank with a dog-like devotion which even his return to Africa and to certain customs of his old life in the jungle had not altered. At night he lay on a mat on the veranda outside his master's door, waking at the least sound, lifting his tall black frame from the blackness, always alert, always defensive.

"Just the same," Ned Shackleton said, "I wish you hadn't brought him."

"By the way, what are you going to do with the damn' ape when you get it? Keep it in the third story like Marakoff?"

"You forget," Shackleton said without irritation, "my purpose isn't to keep my particular kind of ape in London, but to study one in its own haunts, right here in Africa."

The two men were sitting on the veranda, watching the heavy moon drop into the bay.

It was very late. Indoors, the tropical night was too hot for sleep. Outdoors it was too full of moonlight, and the faint rustle of palm leaves, and the long, shuddering roll of the surf on the shingle.

"You know damn well I couldn't leave Bimbi behind," said Frank, unable to leave the subject alone. "Cranbrook was not exactly a safe place for poor old Bimbi, with the police rounding up every African in England."

Ned Shackleton looked away to sea. The red lights of a tramp steamer, lying to beyond the bar, winked out of the darkness. Presently, and without turning around, he said, slowly:

"You should never have gone down to Cranbrook that night. That was a fatal mistake. I thought at the time it was

a wild thing to do. I've blamed myself since for letting you go."

There was a brief pause. Frank's eyes, fixed on his friend, were suddenly startled and alert. Then he laughed, with a semblance of casualness.

"We all make mistakes—fatal or otherwise," he said, lightly. "My running down to Cranbrook was just a piece with a lot of other damn' foolishness I let myself in for." Presently he went on, slowly: "I can't help thinking of Dornia." There was a slight hesitation in the way he spoke her name.

"Somehow, the thought of her having been out here with that devil Marakoff haunts me. I keep remembering little things she let fall from time to time. Torture for the sake of science—that was Marakoff. He didn't even spare the woman he professed to love. A woman like that, think of her! Made for everything beautiful, subjected to everything beastly. Marakoff and his apes!"

He shivered. It was as though a chill wind had struck across the tropical night. The bitterness in his voice deepened. "She had reason enough to hate him. I wonder sometimes she didn't kill him out here where it all happened. I can't help seeing her, too, that evening. Do you remember?"

Ned Shackleton leaned forward and snuffed his cigarette on the low railing.

"I thought we'd agreed not to talk about that evening," he said. "Best just to remember that we're far away from it all, now."

"Maybe we are, maybe we aren't," Frank returned, enigmatically. "Dornia and I have an agreement. There's a clasp

she used to wear. If she sends it to me, I am to go—no matter where, no matter when.”

“I think I’d forget about that, if I were you.”

“No, by God!” Frank brought his clenched fist down on the other open palm. “I’ll never forget it. You don’t forget people to whom you’re bound like that. At least, I don’t.”

Shackleton shrugged his shoulders. “Your affair, old man. But I confess I’ll breathe more freely when we’ve put several hundred miles of the Sanaga behind us.” He added, anxiously: “You’ve been careful not to let anyone suspect where we’re bound, haven’t you? The Valley, and all that?”

“Good Lord!” Frank burst out, irritably. “You don’t have to warn me. If anything goes wrong, I’ve got a damn’ sight more to lose by it than you have. What does the Valley mean to you? An ape!” He laughed shortly. “I’ve told you what it means to me—wealth, power, fame—everything! Provided the stuff is there, as I think it is.” His voice rose exultingly. “Remember how, when you first told me about the Valley, I asked you about the rocks in that section? And when the sun shone full on the cliffs whether they gave off a shimmering blue haze? Remember telling me about the ledge under the extinct crater that the natives said was blue and green like a peacock’s breast? That’s what I’ve got to see. If it is what I think it is——”

The moon had rolled below the coco-nut palms. It flooded the veranda. But Ned Shackleton’s face was in shadow.

“Yes?” he said, quietly.

“If it is what I think it is, it changes the whole world—not just for me.” He made an impatient wave of his hand.

“That’s the least part of it. Power, man—power, that’s

what's shut up in those rocks. Power such as only Lucifer dreamed of. Power to turn the wheels of industry for a million years. You know what helium has done. Well, the thing that is there will put helium off the map." He broke off, adding more to himself than to the man at his side: "That would be something to lay in the lap of old England! And, I've got a formula for it, man, and I am the only one that has it."

The moonlight falling athwart the water lighted a broad pathway to his feet. All the languor and listlessness that usually marked him were gone now. This was a new Frank, lifted out of himself by the dream that possessed him.

"Chemistry, man," he said, dreamily. "Chemistry's the new god. Creation's not over yet, all completed in six days as the parsons preach. It's still going on, gloriously, all around us. The chemists have a finger in it. They're the archangels of the new god moving over the face of the waters."

"You say you have a formula?"

"It's mine now. Old Daubigné worked it out. You remember him at the university. Lord! what a man he was! His daughter worked with him. So in a way it was hers, too. She gave it to me."

"I see. I didn't know."

Ned Shackleton put out his hand. For several minutes there was silence. Then Frank sighed, as though suddenly tired.

"I think I'll turn in. Coming?"

"No, I'll sit awhile longer."

The white moonlight on the waters, the long line of sounding surf whiter than the moonlight; in the distance the

red and green lights winking—winking. There was a soft sliding sound. Ned Shackleton turned.

Bimbi, crouched on the mat outside Frank's door, had raised himself on one elbow and was staring at him out of watchful eyes.



Chapter Fourteen

MANGROVE SWAMP

THE dawn had brought another steamer to join the greasy little tramp off the harbour bar.

Ned Shackleton, studying her squat funnels and heavily laden decks through his glasses from the hotel veranda, was able to read the name painted with many flourishes of tar-nished gold across her high stern.

He thrust his head into Frank Merrington's room.

"The *Daphne's* come," he reported. "With average luck we should get our stuff taken off her and put aboard the paddle-boat to sail tomorrow morning."

"Has the paddle-boat come down-river?" Frank asked.

"She docked yesterday. Schnitter came down in her. He had an idea, it seems, I might be coming by the *Daphne*. And there's more than one man can do getting the stuff transferred, hiring the porters, boatmen, and the rest. He didn't know, of course, that you'd be along. Decent of him, I call it."

"I doubt if you're the only attraction Schnitter finds in Douala," said Frank, tersely.

His mood of the previous night had passed. Frank, the chemist, seeing visions of a new day, dreaming of power to transmit power, possessing already worlds beyond imagining, as do all those who are possessed by a dream, that Frank who had stood clear-eyed and with head proudly flung back in the moonlight, was lost again in the old Frank of the

heavy-lidded eyes, the scoffing, rather *blasé* young man of Mayfair.

They found Schnitter the centre of a chattering mob of blacks on the wharf where the paddle-boat from Yoko was moored. A creaking, vile-smelling donkey engine was unloading sacks of peanuts and mahogany logs from her hold. The long native canoes darting back and forth from the *Daphne* to the quay, and oared by excited, shouting Kru men, were like slender, dark seabirds, fleet and strong.

Schnitter elbowed his way to them out of the press of swaying black bodies. He mopped his brow fervidly with a scarlet bandana. Frank noted with grim amusement the silver bracelet that adorned the ex-trader's thick, hairy wrist.

"Forty boatmen ought to be enough, *hein*." It was characteristic of the man that he made it a statement rather than a question. "Ten rowers to a dugout. I'll line 'em up if you'll look them over, Mr. Shackleton. Kru men all of them, the best boatmen on the West Coast."

Then his eyes fell on Bimbi, standing aloof and motionless at Frank's elbow. Schnitter's eyebrows went up in appraisal.

"That's a likely-looking boy you've taken on," he commented. "What is he, M'pangwe?"

Ned Shackleton said, curtly:

"He belongs to my friend Merrington. He brought him from England."

"White-collar nigger, *hein*?" Schnitter spat contemptuously. "So much good meat wasted. Take an African out of the Bush and he goes bad on you. They can't stand civilization. It rots 'em. My advice is send the fellow back or drop

him overboard. Where we're going he won't be worth his keep."

"Sorry," Frank cut in, sharply. "Bimbi goes where I go. I hope that is quite clear."

"*Ach!* A valet? For the jungle?"

Schnitter's long upper lip lifted in the sardonic ghost of a smile. He shrugged his heavy shoulders and turned back to the group of natives.

A slow flush mounted to Frank's cheek. He swung on his heel and, followed by Bimbi, mute and watchful as always, went on to Madame Martin's.

The *Daphne* had brought custom. The big room was crowded; the phonograph whined unceasingly. Madame, erect and hard of eye and smile and bosom, sat enthroned behind the *comptoir*. The height of the steadily increasing pile of bank notes under her hand could be measured by the slow widening of her smile.

Miette came languorously across the balcony. A servant brought glasses and a calabash of palm wine.

"Isn't that a new boy?" Frank asked. His eyes, gradually learning to distinguish differences in the black faces which at first had seemed to him indistinguishable one from another, noted the man's stealthy sureness of movement. It indicated an intelligence several grades above that of the idly grinning and chattering boys who hung about the courtyard and obeyed Miette's commands with lazy incompetence. He noted, too, the red tattoo mark on his cheek. Many of the blacks were tattooed, but he'd never seen one done in red before.

Miette shrugged. "The *Daphne* brought him. But he was here before—long ago. Now he returns."

But Frank, following the man with his eyes, was thinking that somewhere, sometime, he had seen the fellow before. Somewhere he had waited on him, like this, had brought glass and bottle, and stood silent and watchful at his elbow; there, and yet not there.

It was the same way that Bimbi had of serving you, as though it were really you who served him by filling your part in a mysterious ritual of which he was priest and you only the acolyte understanding nothing. Where had he seen the man before?

Merrington's mind, groping, clutched at tag ends of memories. Almost he remembered—almost. But Miette leaned closer. She was like one of the heavy jungle flowers bending to him out of the forest, calling him with her fragrance and exotic velvet beauty, drawing him farther and farther into that green veil of mystery.

On his arrival in Africa, Bimbi had discarded the linen jackets of Miss Leila's devising. He wore now only a loin cloth of scarlet cotton. There was only the straight, proud carriage of his magnificent body, the purposefulness in the set of his head, and, sole relic of civilization, his wrist watch, to distinguish him from the thousands of natives who thronged the streets of the port. There, the Coast-town blacks looked at him curiously, stood aside to let him pass, feeling his scornful glance, like the cut of a whip across their bodies.

Now, as he took the trail over the rice swamps, he trod the rotting planks that crossed the low-lying mandioc fields, walking straight and proud, disdainful of the swarms of malaria-ridden natives and gaunt, pot-bellied children who

crowded to the fence palings and called after him. His eyes were set on something far ahead. Under his arm he carried a live white cock.

Presently, beyond the swamps where the jungle came down to meet the fringes of the Coast settlement, his searching eyes descried a hive-shaped grass hut. He hastened his pace. The sun was dropping, a ball of molten fire, into the sea. Soon the quick tropical night would fall, and the jungle would awake and stretch itself and come alive.

The interior of the lone hut under the mangrove trees was very dark. Only the glow of a tiny fire gleamed out of the blackness like a single sinister eye. Bimbi bent his tall head and entered. In the far corner, shrouded by the darkness, something rustled.

"O wise one of the far-seeing eyes," the M'pangwe spoke in deep, sonorous tones, "give me of your wisdom."

Out of the heap of skins and leaves in the corner of the hut a faint, very old voice moaned:

"You have come from a long way off?"

"I have come from a long way off."

"You are starting on a long journey?"

"I am starting on a long journey."

"You would know what waits at the end of that journey?"

"I would know what waits at the end of that journey."

The figure rose and came forward into the centre of the hut. It crouched over the fire pot, blowing the smouldering twigs until they leaped into flame. The light danced on the crooked body of an ancient black woman. Around her gaunt loins hung a fringe of grasses strung with kingfisher feathers; a necklace of leopard's teeth dangled over her withered breasts. Her long, grisly hair, into which were braided bits

of coloured cloth, and feathers, and the skulls of tiny birds and vermin, framed horribly her wrinkled face, in which only the sunken, bloodshot eyes seemed alive.

"Feed the fire," she commanded.

Bimbi squatted on the dirt floor and untied a knot in his loin cloth. He took from it a piece of silver which he dropped at the edge of the fire. A claw-like hand closed upon it.

Then the hand was thrust out again and scattered fragments of bark over the coals. A dense, pungent smoke filled the hut.

"The fetishes require a sacrifice."

For reply Bimbi laid the live cock on the stone before the fire, and with a quick stroke of his knife severed the head from the body. A jet of warm blood spurted into the flames.

The voodoo woman groaned horribly. Her body, writhing and swaying from side to side, seemed shaken by a wind. Her claw-like hands plucked at the column of smoke that rose from the fire, as though to draw some secret power from it.

Bimbi, squatting on his haunches before the sacrificial stone, began to sway rhythmically from side to side. His deep groaning echoed the harsher cry of the witch.

"The trail is long." The woman's voice lingered on the words. "By great water there is a way, and by little water the trail goes, and by forest. . . . White men's feet on the trail. . . ." Her voice rose in a sudden shrill shriek: "It is the Secret Place. Brothers of the Blood, beware. The Yellow One. The Yellow One. There is blood . . . blood."



Chapter Fifteen

UP-RIVER

DOUALA was left behind.

Ned Shackleton was glad to exchange the golden beach, the thundering surf, and the tossing Coast palms, for the quiet and the mystery of the inland and the river. He was glad to exchange the ugly half-squalid mixture of native and European interests, the taint of unscrupulous trade and half-breed craftiness which swarm in the Coast towns; glad to take up, in place of them, what seemed to him the cleaner, native interests of the jungle. Soon he would hear no more of the amusing, ludicrous, pidgin English; would see no more of the clownishness typical of the Coast negroes. Instead, there would be the dark and shining dignity of his inland tribesmen, bearers, runners, hunters, and stockade boys, with their melodious speech and their rich voices.

He was restless and eager to see Kolak and Bartu, his gorilla-hunters, waiting for him at the stockade. He wanted to watch again old M'bangá bending over a newly killed buck, making his careful calculations as to the skinning of it, like a man who loves his art. His thought ran ahead eagerly, and saw Mimba, with his strong slim, bronze body, beautiful as a discus-thrower, stooping over the *kanaris*, the clay cooking-pots, with the three cook boys waiting near for the coveted honour of being shouted at.

It was as though some fever of the jungle had already at-

tacked not his body, but his mind, calling up in it picture after picture, keeping it tossing and restless and awake.

While Frank gazed with a general and lazy interest at the yellow river, and the slow, vivid banks slipping by, his own eye watched eagerly for what he knew it would soon find, at given intervals of time—clearings along the banks, and in those clearings groups of natives looking out on the passing of the paddle-boat. And his ear listened for the drums; not the incessant chattering, near rattling, drums of the Coast towns, but the more mysterious drums of the jungle, beating more irregularly and wonderfully, drum-beats perhaps relayed from town to town—some jungle message winging its way.

In the stern of the paddle-boat a crowd of natives were alternately chattering, laughing, singing. One of them, Bakai, a tall powerful black, with a scar across one cheek and a red wheel tattooed on the other, and eyes in which it seemed not so much the pupils as the whites ran from side to side, like white mice in a trap, was the centre of attention.

Bakai was putting himself through antics and tricks; spinning a shilling; jumping suddenly in the air and coming down on it with both feet. Then, keeping his feet on it, picking it out of the thick hair on the top of his head and showing it to the others on his astonished palm. Then laughter, clapping, and shouts.

Frank Merrington turned to look at them.

“Lord! Aren’t they children, though!”

At that moment a strange sound cut across the natives’ childlike laughter. Bakai, who had let his head fall back between his shoulders, gave suddenly, softly, yet blood-curdlingly, a strange staccato laugh like the laugh of a hyena.

Ned Shackleton started slightly.

"For the Lord's sake!" said Frank Merrington. "What was that hell-yell for?"

Ned Shackleton did not answer. He was watching interestedly the group of suddenly sobered natives.

"That," said Schnitter, joining them for a moment and removing a cigar he was rolling between his lips before lighting it, "is what you'd call a smart-Alec trick. That man's what I call a white man's black. He came out on the *Daphne*. I engaged him to unload our goods from it, and then he must have stowed away on this boat at Douala. They'll do that if you give 'em a chance, the way a dog does that isn't wanted."

Then Schnitter got his cigar lighted and passed on.

"If you don't mind my joining in ——"

The two men turned.

The round, rather booming voice belonged to a comfortable-looking man; short, stocky, with face and hands about the colour of tan bark, a scar on his forehead, startlingly blue eyes, a white beard, and a strong Scotch accent.

"I've got a very different reason to give you, if you've a mind to pick it up."

"Glad to, I'm sure," said Frank Merrington, easily. "I'm alive for reasons. It's my opinion you need a lot of them in this world."

"That you do, my lad."

The Scotchman pointed him a quick, blue glance.

With his left hand he got the stem of his pipe settled finally in just the right place between his lips, and fetched matches with his right hand out of the deep pocket of his rather shabby linen suit. When he struck the match, holding

it between his first and second fingers, they saw that the right hand had only the stump of a thumb.

"MacRae's my name," he said. "And I've traded up and down this continent pretty much everywhere; from over in the big-game country where it looks like Creation on the sixth day, *just* before the Lord made Adam; right down to the Cape and up this Coast. If Africa was small enough, I could put it in me pocket for an old coin. And one thing I've learned very well, and that is that you'd best not go into the country unless you're well informed. I did that, and I lost a friend by it." He held up his right hand and his stump of a thumb. "But, as our friend Mr. Rud-yard Kipling says, 'that's another nursery rhyme altogether.'"

He paused and took several tugs at his pipe, and then went on:

"What I started to tell you is that that black man givin' the laugh of a hyena reminded me of strange things. I'm not sayin' I'm sure, mind you. I'm but givin' you my opinion. I've travelled much, as I say, and everywhere I've found the natives full of fears. They're afraid of stones, and trees, and water, for the devils that may live in them. They won't point to anything. They won't call most things by name, for fear of calling the devils out of them. But back here somewhat—way back near what you'd call the gorilla country—there's a band of them that live in hiding as you might say. And they haven't just those same fears about any animal, excepting the gorilla. They think the gorilla's sacred. I was told this by an old chief who saved my life once. He called them Brothers to the Gorilla, though I can't say what they call themselves.

"They believe all the gorillas in the country beyond here

are going to change suddenly some day into full-grown men—three times as powerful as the average native—just as the gorilla is three times as powerful. I once saw a big male gorilla take up a native in his arms. He didn't tear and maul him the way other animals would. He just tossed him, and threw him like a ball, and broke all his bones for him that way. Well, when those gorillas turn into men they'll be a powerful lot. They'll own the world, and if they're given the proper respect and worship, and aren't allowed to be molested now, they'll give all of everything back there, when the time comes, to the faithful. D'you see?"

"All of what?" Frank Merrington's voice was keen.

"All of everything that lies back yonder there." The Scotchman waved his thumbless hand inclusively up-river. Then he ran a knowing look from one to the other of them. "And believe me, there's plenty. If East Africa is the sixth day of Creation, this up here might be called the New Jerusalem. The walls were of amethyst, ye mind. And it's my opinion"—he shrewdly narrowed one eye—"that a native that dares to imitate the laugh of a hyena is a different sort, and just might well and likely belong to the brotherhood I've mentioned."

"And your advice would be, I suppose, to 'ship him somewhere east of Suez'?" said Merrington.

Ned said nothing.

The Scot wreathed himself in smoke before he replied.

"I'm not presuming to advise you," he said. "I'm merely remarking that it's a strange world, this black one. And it's much to be studied. I met a woman down in Eseka, an American she was. She told me her niece, a very smart woman—a Miss Langdon her name was, I believe—was on

her way out here. Her niece was interested in psychology and had come out here to study witchcraft. She is writing articles for some newspaper. Well, that's a study for you! There's all kinds, of course. I once heard of a man who was studying diphtheria in fishes! And I said to her, 'Ma'am, your niece is coming to the incomparable right place.' And she is, of course. There's plenty of wild beasts in the jungle, but not more than there are wild beliefs. And you'd best be as careful of running into one as the other.

"But there! I've talked too much, I'm sure, and we're not far from Yoko. And I've some trifles of goods out from Manchester to unload. So I'll bid you good-bye."

He walked away from them. They saw him stop to examine and identify some boxes and small bales on the deck of the paddle-boat.

"Nice old cove," said Frank, "but I think he's off. I don't know anything about Africa, but I think all that about that hell-yelling native is guff and a long bow. Bimbi's got that man with a red wheel on his cheek skinned alive. I don't believe there's a wild beast that old Bim can't imitate. I haven't heard him do it for years, but when we were youngsters, Lord! he'd curdle your blood and raise your hair if you asked him to!"

Schnitter came back.

"May I speak with you, Mr. Shackleton?"

Ned Shackleton stepped aside with him.

"I'm going to put that man Bakai off at Yoko and tell him to go back by the trail. That is"—he screwed up his eyes—"unless it wasn't by chance that he came." He coughed behind his hand, keeping his eye on his employer.

"I engaged him," Ned Shackleton spoke easily and a little coldly.

"I see," said Schnitter. "Well, you know, of course, he's been a London nigger for several years. I quizzed him. He knows Carstensen. I knew Carstensen. The whole Coast knew Carstensen. The sort of a man you wouldn't pick up; or if you had to, you'd pick him up with the tongs, and hold your nose tight with the other hand."

For a moment Ned Shackleton did not reply. Then he said: "Bakai speaks English pretty well. That will probably be of help."

The back of Schnitter's neck became a fine plum colour, as it always did when he was angry, but not at full liberty to speak.

"You're the boss," he said, putting his hands behind him and patting the back of one against the palm of the other, "but you're sure as hell to make trouble for yourself if you engage half-breeds or civilization trash. That's my advice, and it's sound. You mean you want to keep him?" He flung a shrewd glance from the corners of his eyes.

"Yes. He is to be kept."

Schnitter was eloquently silent a moment, then he said: "There's just one thing I'll ask you, Mr. Shackleton, if you get into trouble when these damned riff-raff Africans you pick up turn savage, you won't blame me? I've lived my twenty years in the jungle and I'm not without experience."

"No," said Ned Shackleton, evenly. "It is precisely for your experience that I value you most."

It seemed to Schnitter this gave him more rope. He bolted to the end of it.

"You've got a man there that civilization's spoiled, 'white

men's blacks' I call 'em. And he's tattooed with the mark of the wanderer, besides. That's what that red wheel means. Don't know whether y'know."

"Yes, I've heard so," Shackleton's voice was remarkably good-tempered. "But after all, I'm something of a wanderer myself."

At Yoko, the blacks laughed, and shouted, and swarmed like ants, running, fetching, carrying, and, under Schnitter's direction, stowed the stores away in the three big dugouts that waited. As they worked they chanted, and as they sang they suited the rhythm to the labour, always putting a heavy jazz accent into the upward heave and lift, so that it almost seemed the music, not themselves, carried and disposed of the burdens.

The old Scot was looking after the unloading of his "trifles out from Manchester," his helmet now despairingly on the back of his head, now tilted resolutely over his nose, now over one ear, now over the other, according as exasperation or tropical discomfort dictated.

"Wonder if the old duffer really knows anything. About the Valley, I mean. I'd like to have pumped him."

"The rule," said Ned Shackleton, briefly, "is never to lead trumps. Let anyone talk of the Valley who wants to. Don't talk of it yourself."

Douala, Madame Martin's, the talk on the veranda, gave this remark, for Frank, an unpleasantly teasing sting. He wanted to flare out: "Look here, old fellow, I'm fed up on your caution. I'm going to talk as I damn please." Instead, he said: "Look at Schnitter trying to give himself apoplexy!"

Schnitter was bullying, directing, cajoling, shouting, or laughing as the need arose. Splendid manager, Schnitter! Immensely valuable! A man who should be kept and not interfered with. Ned Shackleton thought of this now. But if it comes to choosing between gold and silver, you choose gold. If Schnitter did not get over his dislike for Bakai, or if he showed it too plainly, it would be Schnitter, not Bakai, who would go.

In two hours everything was shipshape. Two of the big dugouts were already in midstream, the other two were ready to push off, when an altercation arose.

M'Bali, the helmsman of the last dugout, crouched and refused to take his place.

Schnitter came up with a scowl and looking as though he owned Africa. "Get in there!" he ordered. His voice sounded like drum-beats rapped out sharply.

But M'Bali cowered and would not stir.

"What's got into M'Bali?" said Frank.

Ned Shackleton disregarded him.

"*Balo mwan?*" (What's the matter?) he said, sharply, to Schnitter.

M'Bali kept his head hid in his arm.

"Has a hunch there's death in the dugout," said Schnitter.

"What does he mean?"

Schnitter shrugged his shoulders.

"One of their fool ideas. He calls death 'stillness.' You know if they kill a man, he stays where he falls. They call him 'the still one.' He says: 'You come from death. You go to death. I will not steer. Friends of stillness ride in that dugout.'"

"Take him in your dugout," said Ned Shackleton sharply. "Give us the other helmsman."

M'Bali followed Schnitter, his head down, like a child very glad, but still a little ashamed, to have gotten its own way.

"Rotten luck," said Frank. "I don't like all this talk about stillness and death. Why do we have to go by dugout at all? Couldn't we go 'round by the trail?"

"Certainly not," said Shackleton. "If you're going to be disturbed by everything like that, you'd better turn back at once. These fellows can always trump up a superstition to cover anything they don't want to do."

"I know." Frank Merrington shrugged his shoulders, stepped into the canoe. "I'm probably thin-skinned. What's the odds, anyway?"

The river once more!

The river from the deck of the paddle-boat was, after all, a different thing. It was the river—from the deck of the paddle-boat. But now, low and level with it, you were nearer to its mystery. You could put out your hand and feel the drag of its power.

The river once more!

Swift and slow and tawny. Tawny like a lion's mane. Quick-running, strong-of-purpose, eager in the narrow mid-stream, but along the shores smooth-flowing, leisurely, lingering, forever lingering, unwilling to leave, like a lover who lingers at parting from the woman he loves; slow and forgetful, unwilling to part from the great green and yellow fronds of ferns and bending trees spotted with the purple and cobalt shadows of their spacing and their distances; languorous

and unwilling to leave the long, drooping, clinging vines that lean and drop and drip their green, unhurrying cascades of verdure from great heights to mingle their leaves lingeringly with the lingering river.

The river once more! More, far more than a river. Mystery, and the hurrying, and lingering passing of time, and the life of man. Secrecy, and power, and touch, and departure; past and future; ages that have been and will be. Africa! Africa!

Like a leaf on a stream there came to Shackleton the memory of the mild mists and the spots of blurred lights of London; then the tawny river whirled it away from him. Tawny like a lion, and around about him—all Africa, and the pulse of Africa, beating in the triumph, and fear, and exaltation, and warning of her drums.

Frank leaned back, with his hands back of his head, and his eyes closed against the shimmer of hot, blue sky.

From the dugouts ahead, the swinging boat chant of the natives, a stream above a stream, flowed back to them and joined that of their own men; and through it all, like rain on a river, the unresonant *pluck, pluck* of the little native seven-stringed hand harps. The chant rose and fell in melodious, utterly unexpected intervals, unfinished, unresolved, like questions without an answer; questions of jungle, and sky, and brief-passing boats, and permanent swinging rivers.

Once or twice when there was the danger of river rapids, the chant stopped abruptly and gave place to savage shouts, the natives shouting, as Shackleton explained, to frighten themselves and rouse themselves to a united courage.

So the afternoon flowed by with the river, and it was not until just before the quick sun went down that they were

all comfortably camped on a long, broad sand-bar of the river for the night.

No more plaintive music. The natives at the river end of the sand-bar ran like ants again, fetching wood, building their fires, preparing their meal, and sat about in groups on their haunches before their flat or round calabash bowls, and filled themselves full of dried meat, and rice soaked in palm oil. Then, their meal finished, the drums and the harps, and a pipe or two, and wild dancing, and cheers, and shouts, and clapping, and leaping, whirling; then sometimes slower measure, bodies swaying lithely from the hips, bending back as far as they would go, and jerking forward again—all of it silhouetted against the brightness and smoke of the fires, and back of these the vast vegetation of the jungle.

“Look at them!” Schnitter turned. He had come to the jungle end of the sand-bar to make sure Shackleton and Merrington had everything they needed. “Aren’t they a lively lot? Don’t they look like black mosquitoes dancing?”

Schnitter laughed. When he laughed, his forehead had a way of expanding and going farther back. The best thing about Schnitter was his laugh. When he was a little boy, some right kind of woman must have taught him to laugh, and he hadn’t forgotten it.

Then suddenly, what everyone had been waiting for came—the real night, the night-daytime of the jungle; the moon. With an incredible swiftness its edge appeared and rose. It was as though a royal attendant advanced suddenly, holding up a great golden fan for signal that the blue jungle night decked in incredible sapphire, and the many eyes of peacock plumes, and with prowling beasts crouched at her feet, was there.

Mystery behind and before, and a light that turns everything suddenly to silver and ebony.

Frank Merrington sat with his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands, and his eyes closed.

Lord! how bright!

It was a night like this, only not so startlingly bright—gentler, tenderer—the last night he and she were together. If only he'd forget the whole thing. He often did. That was what drink was good for. He'd take a drink now and go to sleep, and then let the damn' moon do anything it wanted to.

Ned Shackleton watched him.

"Anything wrong?" he said, in a pretendedly indifferent tone. "What are you thinking about, Dornia?"

Frank shook his head, and then raised it. His face looked haggard in the moonlight.

"No, not Dornia. I'm thinking about Christine, Christine Daubigné. I told you she gave me the formula. But I didn't tell you the rest. The last time I saw her, before she died, was a night like this. That was when she gave it to me. I think she knew. She had a way of knowing things. You see, she and I cared for each other. If she had lived, there wouldn't have been any Dornia for me—nor all the rest of it. But there—don't let's talk of it. I'd rather you didn't."

There was a long pause, then Ned Shackleton said:

"There's something else, though, that I'd like to say to you, if you don't mind. I've been thinking of a good many things since we talked in Douala. I know Africa a whole lot better than you do. The odds are heavy here. I'm supposing we'll both get back safe." He paused.

"Yes?" said Frank.

"But suppose we shouldn't. I've got most of my work in

notes. Some other man could carry it on if it was necessary. If anything happens to me, there's a little oilskin packet marked 'Private Papers' that would clear up everything and make everything easy. I thought maybe you'd like to make some arrangement of the kind."

"About what?" Frank laughed a little harsh laugh. "I haven't a farthing. And in case of my death, everything I'd inherit when I'm older would go to Joan and Derek, anyway."

"I don't mean that kind of thing." Ned Shackleton turned the fingers of one hand in and looked at the little spots of moonlight on the nails. "I was thinking of the formula."

Frank said nothing, but he got up, and his tall shadow cast by the firelight leaped up tall and dark, and, it seemed, defensive into the jungle trees back of him.

"That formula belonged to Christine," he said, tensely. "She gave it to me. There isn't the god or devil on the earth will get it from me."

"Then if anything should happen to you ——"

"Then she and I will have it together again. That's all."

Late in the night, when the natives lay asleep, wrapped in their blue sleeping-cloths, and Frank Merrington slept heavily, with his head on his arm, Ned Shackleton rose. The excitement of the jungle would not let him rest. Not many miles away, now, lay the stockade. Beyond that, the moonlight would be falling on Marakoff's hut. The whole jungle was, for Ned Shackleton, pervaded by the thought of Marakoff. He remembered what Marakoff had said that day at the scientific meeting about the jungle of the human mind, and the beasts that crouch there.

Not far from him, and only kept back by the camp fires

that were left burning, beasts of the jungle crouched in the black shadows.

Tomorrow he would be plunging farther into the tropical forest and its shadows. But tonight he wanted to get away from it, for a few moments, at least. He wanted for a few moments to be relieved of even the thought of it. He would go to a little distance, and stand for a little while in the full moonlight on the sand-bar, where not a shadow of any kind could touch him.

He stood looking down for a moment at Frank Merriington, sleeping so deeply. "The jungle of the human mind!" Yes. He would get away from it all for a few moments.

As he went, in one of the deepest shadows, a shadowy head lifted itself warily. Bakai had separated himself from the others. Bakai lay hid in the shadows. Bakai was watching.



Chapter Sixteen

HE-WHO-SEES-EVERYTHING

THE big drums boom. The smaller ones rattle and crack. The bugles of antelope horns are blown. There are cries short and quick and glad, as the barking of watch-dogs is quick and glad when they welcome a familiar step.

There is no plucking of little harps now, nor wailing of plaintive songs. It is a time for noise and rejoicing.

The stockade negroes and the boatmen of the first dugout are already carrying loads up the path leading from the river.

Down the river, at a long distance yet, the drums of the other dugouts are heard, and from time to time the drums in the villages in the forest, or along the river, at different distances and intervals—click and converse, in telegraphic rhythm—*rat-tat—tat-tat—rat!—tat-tat—tat*. Very well enunciated, very clear, very insistent.

The headman in the stockade is banging out on his drum a name; the drum taps that stand for a name; “He-Who-Sees-Everything! He-Who-Sees-Everything!”

Kolak and Bartu are beside themselves. When the river drums were first heard, and when the headman began to beat out that name, they ran to the hut where they are keeping the skin of the fine big black gorilla they killed the week before.

When they killed it, old B’wari, the skinner, was cautioned to do a fine piece of work. Yes, and old B’wari did a fine piece of work.

There the skin hangs in the hut at the end of the stockade, near the baobab tree.

The other natives give the hut a wide berth. For though the skin itself is drying splendidly, the head still looks very living, and under the drooped eyelids the terrible fierceness seems still to lurk.

Kolak and Bartu, who were trained at the mission school and who are gorilla-hunters of the first order, and have no fear of the beast, nevertheless will not go into the hut at night. That is why the bamboo sticks on which the skin dries are propped in vessels of water so that the water may keep watch against ants and other insects.

The negroes of the stockade are eager to see the other Yoko natives who will come in the other dugouts.

A few will be mission natives, but most of them will be from the village of old Chief Bulawango, and these are sure to have wonderful tales to tell of the hunt, of escape from devil-spirits, and the like, and there will be feasting and shouting.

They are delighted to get Schnitter back again. Schnitter is sometimes harsh, but on the whole he is good to them, and a just man.

Schnitter is a trader—not of beads, and cloth, and ivory, and pots, and pans, and calico, but of service. Pay him so much service, and he will give you so much favour. Sometimes he will put extra rice, or cassava greens, in the calabash of the man who deserves them. And that is a pleasant thing, not because the rice and greens are so good, but because a sense of being superior to one's fellows adds mightily to any dish a man eats.

"Give-'em's dead," says Schnitter, quoting an old saying

he once heard and liked. "Lend-'em's mighty sick. There's nothing for nothing and precious little for sixpence." "Nothing for nothing," that is Schnitter's creed and practice, and it works very well.

Schnitter calls them in a big loud voice that sounds even above the headman's drum, and the loud *tack-tack, tackity-tack*, of the small calabash drums.

The men come swarming like children.

Schnitter claps his hands.

A loud silence falls.

Schnitter's glance runs from one brown face to another. Schnitter's eye at such times runs in that merry, secret way that mice have, who know many things that you do not know.

"*M'wang dimba!*" (Listen to me!) "He-Who-Sees-Everything will soon be here. He went. He has returned. He has been far. Jungle, more jungle. Over the Great Thirst where no water flows; then over water where no land is. Some of you grumbled. Some of you said: 'Beasts will devour him. He will not return.' In a little while he will return. He-Who-Sees-Everything."

A great shout goes up. The headman beats on his drum madly.

Schnitter claps his hands again. They quiet down and turn their heads to listen.

"With him come two jungle men like yourselves. These two have lived in the white men's country. Beware of what they tell you! They will seek to make fools of you. Remember, it is not they who have come back. It is the master who has brought them. Do not consult them. Take all your questions to the master or to me."

A shout from the direction of the river. The natives break and run and swarm. The headman beats, beats, beats his drum. The little drums crack electrically as though their sounds were sparks. "He-Who-Sees-Everything!"

There are answering drums and answering cries from the boat negroes.

A swarm of black ants under a huge magnifying glass. That is what it is like. Like ants they run and turn and bump into one another; go madly in wrong directions, and then swiftly in right ones. Like ants they carry burdens too big for them, and on top of these burdens the hot sun piles the extra invisible burden of the amber of the sunlight, so that their sleek, black bodies shine and drip.

Back of Ned Shackleton and Frank Merrington, Bimbi, square-shouldered, broad-shouldered as an Egyptian, carries a bundle that belongs to his master. His teeth show in a fine grin. His eyes shine. Bimbi walking like a shadow behind Frank, Frank who is his own. Bimbi returns to his very own. Bimbi towers. Around him the trees of the jungle tower. Bimbi, naked save for his loin cloth. And all the while, on Bimbi's wrist the little radium-faced wrist watch, like a symbol of the civilization he has left and abandoned. What will become of its faint, frightened ticking in the midst of the terrible incessant clicking of the telegraph drums of the jungle? Will it be able to hear itself? Will it know whether it is ticking or not?

How faint and far away civilization seems!

All the while, at Cranbrook, Miss Leila Merrington shuffles and reshuffles her cards, and lays them down for

"King solitaire." There is not even Derek to talk to, since Derek has gone up for his examinations. Lord Sleugh, too, has gone, and her own have flown and forsaken her. Almost, she would be glad to see Tony Ogle, but he, too, has dropped out of the world. ("Queen on King; King on ace.")

And all of this comes of her brother, Sir Hugh, having gone, years ago, to Africa, against her advice. Since then there has been a wild tang to all the Merringtons.

There is Toppins left, but Toppins is like cambric tea to some one who has been used to black coffee and strong Oolong. Besides, one day Toppins had red eyes; since then Miss Leila avoids looking at her.

Miss Leila turns each card watchfully as she takes it from the pack and lays it down with indignant fingers, and with fierceness, the fierceness of being thankful to God for being in the right and in possession of her senses in a world that has gone mad. ("Knave on Queen; Ten on Knave!")

But though her hands play "King solitaire," it is a different solitaire her mind plays. Thought after thought she turns up, as her hands turn up cards. Her hearing takes part in it. She puts her hand on the table suddenly, sharply, and almost looks at Toppins.

But no, Toppins has come only to bring tea, not to bring a telegram or cablegram. So Aunt Leila begins shuffling her cards over again. Only, the cards are thoughts, and possibilities, and indignations.

Some day every card will come out right, and she will win this game of mental solitaire. Toppins will bring her a cablegram. The cablegram will read:

"Joan is sick. Frank is almost dead. Bimbi hasn't any more linen coats and has broken a leg. Everybody is re-

pentant. We will admit we've been fools. Please come at once."

So, Aunt Leila shuffles and reshuffles the pack.

Bim! Bam! Rat-tat-tat——tat!

They all want to show accomplishments to He-Who-Sees-Everything: the hunters and skinners; the men who have braided or woven new mats; the ones who have built the new huts. One of the runners, who is a potter as well, brings new clay pots he has made and baked in the sun.

Kolak and Bartu wait, their eyes shining. They can afford to wait.

The old cook comes with a long wooden ladle, and offers to show what he has done or is doing.

Frank Merrington takes off his cork helmet and mops his brow. "Well, if this isn't the hang'dest tea party! Glad to see us, eh?"

The old cook does not understand, but he puts back his head and laughs. Frank Merrington puts back his head and laughs, too.

Several others near by, who are looking at him with amazed interest, begin to pat time with their hands. One of them swings suddenly into an imaginary circle, and turns round and round, singing and giving little short barking shouts at intervals.

"White like the sun!" he sings. "The-One-Who-Laughes!"

"The-One-Who-Laughes!" cry the others, patting time.

"Hair yellow like a lion!" the others shout.

"The-One-Who-Laughes!" the rest answer.

There is good provender. Besides what the hunters have brought, an old chief in the first village to the north has

sent peanuts, and bunches of plantains, and a goat, sugar cane, and wild pineapple.

"The gorilla likes wild pineapple!" chants Kolak.

"The gorilla will eat wild pineapple no more!" chants Bartu.

They can hardly keep their secret about the gorilla skin. The millet and banana broth is ready in the pots.

The-One-Who-Laughes looks in at the hut that has been built for him. "Did Schnitter contrive all this?"

There is a bed of bamboo slats over which two leopard skins are spread. There is even a table roughly made, and a little stool. "Schnitter's ugly about Bimbi, and I don't like him, but those clean skins look good to me."

Later Schnitter commands the natives to put an end to their celebration, and they go to their huts and lie down to sleep, and leave the clearing to the moon.

From the jungle there comes the far-off cry of a leopard, and of another leopard answering nearer. There is all night the occasional beat of drums, quick breath'd dance-drums, slower, occasional wayfaring drums where the natives are taking advantage of the white light to travel the moonlighted trails. There is a refreshing coolness, too; a distillation of coolness. Out of the hot, heavy hanging grapes of the daytime, is pressed the winelike coolness of the night.

The moon walks low in the stockade, high in the tops of the jungle trees that rise like a green wall at a little distance back of the stockade.

Frank Merrington turns sleepily on his leopard skins. What was that the old Scotchman said about walls of amethyst?

Ned Shackleton lies wakeful in his hut. It is as though a

thousand candles were lighted in his mind. The black-faced gorilla that Kolak and Bartu shot seems like a good omen.

He lies wondering whether the rains, since he left and returned, have further demolished what was left of Marakoff's deserted village; and whether Marakoff's hut, which was built stronger than the rest, has withstood the fearful storms, the terrible frantic dances of the lightning, and the shaking tom-toms of the thunder.

Marakoff's hut. Yes, of course Marakoff's hut still stands! It was built for standing! Did not Marakoff build it? Had not Marakoff meant to come back some day?

The moon could have told him.

At a distance from the stockade she has stepped over the threshold of Marakoff's hut.

Yes, the hut is as strong, almost, as when Marakoff built it. Only, instead of the beautiful woman with yellow eyes who once lived there, for Marakoff's purposes, a leopard, with yellow eyes, in one corner, where it has carried its prey, a young antelope, raises its head and looks a long moment searchingly out into the moonlight from the shadow before bending again to its feast.



Chapter Seventeen

AT THE STOCKADE

OLD MACRAE extended his lips cautiously to his cup's rim, raised his eyebrows, drew in a hesitating breath of the tea, found it too hot, set the cup down, and took up his conversation again instead:

"Yes, that's my advice, and I'm an old traveller. There's no information you could get in that section that would be worth to you the life you might lose in getting it."

When MacRae and his handful of natives had turned up at the stockade, Ned Shackleton and Frank Merrington were delighted to see the garrulous old man again; and the blacks, always eager to dispense hospitality, were glad of the occasion.

Schnitter at first eyed MacRae, as he did everyone, with suspicion. But Schnitter loved a good tale, and MacRae was full of them. Moreover, there were other people to suspect besides the Scotch trader. Schnitter's roving eye had more than once caught what he thought was a too understanding look between Bakai and Bimbi.

Ned Shackleton found the old Scotchman full of shrewd knowledge and observation, and questioned him often when Frank Merrington was not there.

"You see, they're a very fanatical lot. And you mustn't forget that secret societies among these people are apt to be grim things. Nobody knows what superstition might lie at the bottom of those societies. It's an old tale, that one

about the panther people; the people who believe the spirit of the panther enters into them, and then they go and do as the panthers do.

"As to Dr. Marakoff's going among them safely, yes, that he did. And if you had Marakoff's powers, I'd not be warning you. A great man he was, and a great psychologist, and that gives a man an advantage. I don't know where he is now. The last I heard was he'd gone back to London, but wherever he is, he's a man who directs and knows the secret mind."

This was the moment for Ned Shackleton to interrupt and say: "You haven't heard, then? No, of course. How could you have heard. There hasn't been time. Marakoff is dead. Murdered in London."

That would have been a wonderful interruption of the old Scotchman's talk; wonderful, too, to watch the old Scotchman's reaction. But he was not interrupted. He went on: "Other men than Dr. Marakoff have travelled among the natives, and tricked them, and bought them with mirrors and alarm clocks and opera hats. That was the game old Du Chaillu started here way back in the 'fifties. But Dr. Marakoff had a different way with them. He controlled them with very different powers. He had a way of knowing what they would do before they did it.

"I'm told they believed he had a magic of the eye and could make them do what he wanted them to do. As to the valley I was talking to you about in the paddle-boat, that there's riches beyond doubt in it I don't question at all."

As the old man said this, Schnitter's glance went to him quickly and eagerly.

"But I'd say it might be certain death to try to get into it. Yet, I believe, as surely as I believe I'm smoking this pipe, that Dr. Marakoff got there. How? Ask Dr. Marakoff that! "

"You see, I pick up a good many odd bits and ravelings of news, going about as I do. It wasn't long ago I saw a man who had his ears cut off by that same Gorilla Brotherhood because he was found within a mile of the Black Caves. Wonderful places they say, the Black Caves, with deep holes in them that you drop in forever if you don't know just where to step.

"I heard that same man rave about a huge leopard that lives in the Caves, that he said was Marakoff. They let the creature live in the Black Caves, and they believe it is Marakoff, and I've heard they give it human beings to eat. Have you heard of that leopard, Mr. Shackleton?"

"No, I haven't," said Shackleton. "But here comes my friend Merrington, and I'm going to ask you not to talk of these things in front of him. Not until he's more used to Africa. He's something of a tenderfoot."

"Oh aye. Well, I won't," said the Scot.

Frank Merrington joined them.

"Look here," he said to Ned Shackleton, "Niamka has just come back, and he says there are elephant tracks. He thinks there may be as many as five beasts." He poured himself tea. "This begins to look like Africa. I'm tired of sitting around; tired of making preparations that never amount to anything."

"Look here, old man"—Ned Shackleton motioned him to sit down—"take it easy. Africa isn't England, you know.

You have to go a bit slow. You can't go through the jungle the way you go through Piccadilly."

When the rest were asleep, a shadowy form came to Shackleton's hut and crouched in the windy night; and in the windy night there came a sound so soft as to be almost inaudible, the call of the grey jungle owl.

The door opened from within.

Without a word Bakai stepped into the hut.

In the blackness of it the two men were aware of each other more by a sense of presence than by sound or sight. Then Shackleton said, quietly:

"When will the meeting of the brotherhood be? And how shall I know?"

"You will know because you will hear the jungle owl call at night four times. That will be the first warning. Three days after it cries it will be time for you to go. On the day when you must go, the owl will cry again when it is dark, before the dawn. It will cry four times. Then leave the stockade and come. I will be waiting. I will take you and the Laughing One, if you will bring him, by the secret trail that leads up to the mouth of the valley."

"Will the first warning come soon?"

"Have patience. The tree that wishes to see the sun in the jungle must grow tall."

"You have told them that I knew Marakoff? That it is Marakoff who sends me?"

"Yes, I have told them. Because of that, it will be safe for you to go."

"And I shall see the ceremonies of the brotherhood?"

"You shall see their secret ceremonies."

Outside, at a little distance from the stockade, the wind went roaring abroad through the great trees of the jungle with the sound of water rushing, and lifting, and cresting, and crashing, and breaking. But despite it, there seemed a great stillness in the hut, the stillness of complete darkness and secrecy.

"Shall I see the gorilla?"

There was another black pause in the midst of a swirling universe, like black nebulae in space; then the voice of Bakai:

"You will see the one who is sacred." Then, in a still earnest but a lighter tone, "Have I kept my promise?"

"You have kept a part of your promise," Shackleton replied, "and you shall have what I said I would give you. I will give you the rest when we return safely."

With one hand Shackleton put something softly into the two outstretched hands of the native; with the other he flashed on and immediately off again, close to the hands, the little spark of his cigarette lighter.

The instant of light showed the two black hands of Bakai cupped, and in the middle of the black cup a small stack of gold.

Then Shackleton opened the door softly, and Bakai slipped out of the hut, swift and quiet as dark slipping water.

Presently another shadow emerged from behind Shackleton's hut; hardly visible, a darkness within the roaring darkness, practically indiscernible, save that there moved with it a small dim disk of brightness, such as shines from the radium face of a watch worn upon the wrist of a man who moves with swiftness, but stealthily.

A moment later a dark figure sat outside Frank Mer-

rington's hut, his knees drawn up, his arms about them, looking straight ahead of him into the swaying blackness.

Suddenly, as though it were the snapping of the giant mainmast of the tossing ship of the world, there came the tremendous crack and roaring crash of a falling tree in the jungle beyond, and the deafening rattle of the shrouds, the chafing palm leaves blown and torn and tormented by its falling.

"Hello! Bimbi! I say! Bimbi! Are you there?"

Bimbi sprang to his feet and entered the hut of his master.

"What the hell's happening out there, Bimbi?"

Bimbi slid down in a crouching posture by the bamboo couch.

"Only the storm walking, and a great tree falling, and the overturning of the homes of creatures and birds who cry, who have lost the old places where they lived, who have lost what was theirs."

"Wonder whatever made us come out to this hole, eh? A night like this makes me think I'd like to see you in your little old white linen coats again, Bimbi, serving us tea. Damn' good old place, Cranbrook was! Wasn't it, Bimbi?"

Bimbi does not answer.

A sudden flash of lightning blinds them, and they both keep silence.

"Bimbi, do you remember the playhouse, and how you used to frighten us? Do you remember?"

Bimbi does not answer. A crash of thunder answers for him.

The lightning stabs here and there, and there, and there, quick and sharp and deep, as though it meant to do its work thoroughly. The drums of the thunder boom and crash, and

roll, roll, roll. The jungle roars like a roused, infuriated beast. No use trying to talk in pandemonium like that.

By and by the lightning stabs less often, and at last puts up its sword. The drums of the thunder march on with the storm and the sounds of them grow less—and less; until at last they are only like waves breaking on a long beach far away.

Bimbi has not answered Frank's questions yet.

"Remember the playhouse, Bimbi?"

Bimbi's eyes go from side to side in his head, as though they were following a thought that moved too quickly and dangerously.

"I do not forget," he said. "Who can forget? Who can forget?"

Moments went by in silence, and more moments. At last Bimbi rose and stood looking down in the darkness at the sleeping figure. Then he stooped lower until his ear almost touched it over the heart. His lips drew back over his white teeth in a smile. His two hands were clenched in the darkness. Then he straightened up again, and left the hut quickly, noiselessly.

The rain has washed everything clear, and burnished it. There is an edge of silver on all the leaves of the forest. The hour of the early morning is silver. The river runs silver. The light is silver. The dew is silver. There are golden plantains steaming in the pot.

M'Bolo is beating the name of some one on the headman's drum.

Bimbi!

The drum says, "He-Who-Has-Returned-to-Us, Returned-to-Us, Returned-to-Us!"

Then M'Bolo pauses before he beats it again, and says in a quick, sharp tone, "Nothing!" Spits and passes his hand over his mouth with the old native gesture of annihilation.

"Bimbi!—Nothing!"

Schnitter goes to Ned Shackleton's hut, and with a deep frown of apprehension tells him, with some inward satisfaction, that at the line-up of the men a few moments before, it was found that Bakai and Bimbi were both missing.

"Bimbi?"

"Yes." Schnitter's forehead moves back as though it were released from thinking, and he smiles. "I don't know what Mr. Merrington will do without his London nigger—excuse me, valet. But my own opinion is you're better off now that Bimbi's gone native and melted back into the pot Mr. Merrington's father fished him out of when he took him out of Africa. As for Bakai, if my opinion's worth anything, you're better off by that a whole lot, too. I told you my opinion at Yoko."

That day M'Bolo can hardly be kept away from his drum, and every time he gets the chance he beats out Bimbi's name, "He-Who-Has-Returned-to-Us, Returned-to-Us, Returned-to-Us."

Schnitter comes by and stops him. "Stop beating that damn' drum!"

There is something lost out of Merrington's eyes, some confidence, or arrogance. There is in his face a subtle change, such as comes over the face of a man, or the body of an animal, who has received an unexpected and unwarranted

and felling blow. His thoughts come slowly and a little numb at first. Bakai? What could Bakai matter to anybody? But Bimbi?

Shackleton, keeping his own thoughts to himself, lends an ear to Merrington's slow and unwilling reasoning. It is unthinkable that Bimbi should have gone off; perfectly unthinkable that Bimbi should have deserted, for that is what it amounts to. Merrington allows himself to go over the past, even a little sentimentally. He brings up all that to prove, if proof is needed, that Bimbi cannot have gone.

"You see, when my mother was dying, Bimbi was there. I believe my mother knew she was going. She gave him the care of me. I was only a little duffer then. She told him he mustn't ever leave me. He's often told me what she said: 'Guard him, Bimbi; Bimbi, never leave him.' I don't believe for a damn' moment he's gone!"

Nevertheless, Bimbi has gone.

Several scouting parties, sent into the jungle to look for him, and shout for him, and beat summoning drums for him, have come back without report of him, and with no report of finding blood tracks.

If he had gone by himself, that would have been one thing. But Bimbi and Bakai are both gone, and that affords something to think about.

"Where's your damn' man, Bakai, gone?"

"These men have all kinds of secret purposes and affiliations," Shackleton says, evenly. "You don't know what goes on in their black minds. Bimbi is a M'pangwe, and they are split into many tribes. Maybe he's gone to show himself to his own, and tell them about London, and maybe by and by he'll come back."

Frank Merrington seizes on this. "Oh, he'll come back all right, of course. You can bet your top-hat on that. But it's his going at all ——"

He breaks off and stares ahead absently into unknown possibility.

But, after all, there isn't any top-hat to bet, and Bimbi is gone. There's no denying that.

Tomorrow is the elephant hunt. The old Ashira rain doctor is blowing his mournful antelope horn to keep the rain and the spirits away. The night has fallen like a quick curtain on the over-hot, over-dramatic day. More fires are lit in the stockade, and there is the occasional moving about of giant human shadows, that leap suddenly, prodigiously, over the tall twelve-foot stockade fence, and lose themselves mysteriously in the darkness of the jungle beyond; and by and by come back just as suddenly, and dwindle and stand behind the men, and only a little larger than men near the fire.

The rain doctor blows and blows and blows on his melancholy antelope horn long, hollow, gasping sounds such as a creature gives before it has its throat cut by the butcher.

Suddenly everyone starts. Outside the stockade there are answering horns and drums and shouting. The forms at the fires stand rigid, or sit with their heads turned, listening. Schnitter gets up and stands with his hands hanging, his stomach out, his shoulders back, listening.

There is singing, and the swinging, moving, smoking light of reed torches can be seen touching the trees into strangeness where the trail leads from the river.

The Scotchman, who is sitting on a keg, smoking, doesn't

say anything, but he watches the light wavering and advancing in the tree-tops.

There is a beating at the gate and a shout.

A leopard skin is thrown over the stockade wall, and a native calls from outside in English:

"We come from Yoko. Father Hilary sends us. We bring you some one."

The blacks rush to unbar the gate, but they fumble stupidly at the bar.

"Open the gate, you fools!"

Merrington goes toward it himself. Before he gets to it it swings open.

The natives in the stockade fall back, afraid and calling: "*M'buiti! M'buiti!*" (A Spirit!)

The spirit stands and looks at them.

There should not have been the hoarse sound of antelope horns and the bark of drums. There should have been flutes and fifes. The natives are blown back by fear at such a sight, as leaves are blown by the wind. They huddle together. A number of them hide their faces.

The Scotchman, ignoring them, takes a quick step up on his keg so that he can see better, raises his chin, and looks. He holds his pipe far out from him in his thumbless hand.

"Well, for the mercy of God!"

Ned Shackleton, his face white as chalk, goes forward.

Merrington stands staring an instant, almost stupidly, as though he had seen an apparition, then his voice comes to him:

"Well, by all the holy cats! Jo-John!"



Chapter Eighteen

LODESTAR

"BUT why should men monopolize all the adventure?" Joan said, gaily, half an hour later.

"Just the same you shouldn't have come, Jo-John." Frank's voice was brotherly severe. "It was a wild thing to do. Wasn't it?" he appealed to Ned Shackleton for support.

"It certainly was a risk," Shackleton admitted.

He was thinking, as he spoke, of Schnitter's tightly pursed lips, and the ominous shake of his head. In the first stir occasioned by Joan's arrival, the German had beckoned him aside for a low-spoken colloquy.

"She shouldn't stay here, Mr. Shackleton. That's flat. The jungle's no place for a white woman. First thing you know she'll be down with fever, or worse. My advice is send her back to Yoko. Let her stay there at the mission until our work's done."

He had felt, as the man spoke, that Schnitter was undoubtedly right. The German knew the jungle. Few men better. He knew, too, the drag on the expedition that the presence of a woman in their midst would be. But all he said was, tersely, "Merrington will look out for her."

"And who'll look out for Merrington?" Schnitter persisted. "Since that black of his took himself off, he's taken it to heart like a woman. No, Mr. Shackleton, if you're

wise to your own interests, you'll send 'em both back, like I say ——"

Shackleton had answered shortly to this, turning on his heel to signify that the discussion was at an end, and Schnitter had shrugged, as out of a wider, more seasoned experience, and gone back to his own hut.

He thought he knew what Schnitter was thinking. That he, Ned Shackleton, was a fool. A fool twice over. Not only for allowing a girl's whim to jeopardize his chances of achievement, but for bringing Frank Merrington with him on a quest at once so delicate and so hazardous.

Merrington was "soft." That would be Schnitter's verdict. The jungle played the deuce with fellows like that. It felt out their weak spots, and played upon them. It brought up its reserve tortures of heat, and flies, and mosquitoes, and the armies of black and red ants that bit furiously by day and by night, and the loathsome grey scorpions that dropped from the thatch on to one's mosquito net and crawled away into the darkness while one lay awake, thinking of these and other unseen crawling horrors, until presently from somewhere beyond the stockade sounded the long shuddering cry of a leopard seeking its prey.

And always, all around, pricking the dark, tiny red stars—two and two—always two and two—stars that were eyes—watching.

If you were "soft," these were the things that got you, finally. You couldn't rid your mind of them.

"They go under," Schnitter would be thinking, "men like Merrington. I've seen 'em. Either they take to opium and black women like the agent at Bondo (a notorious bad lot) or," yes, he would put the alternative as baldly as that, "or

they go mad. They wander off into the jungle—nobody knows where unless it's the leopards. Jungle love, the natives call it. Either way, the jungle gets them in the end."

The jungle—the jungle was the great test, the great black Sphinx, half animal, half woman, luring men by its slow, sensual smile, and the promise of its woman's breast, only to fall upon them, and rend them with its claws. If you could answer her riddle, meet the test she imposed, you came out hard and sure, your manhood vindicated. Schnitter was like that, for all his coarseness. The jungle Sphinx had not got her claws into him. But Frank—Frank was different.

And if the jungle held dangers for Frank, then what about a woman?

All this was in his mind as he looked at Joan sitting at ease in Frank's hut, with Frank perched on the table, swinging his legs and looking at her and laughing, his hand pulling at his little blond moustache in an effort to appear severe and rebuking and superior, and old MacRae cradling his stumpy black brier in his two hands, and staring at her in that puzzled, frowning way he had.

In her trim khaki knickerbockers and leggings, and the boyish shirt, open at the throat, she reminded Shackleton of Rosalind. She had laid aside her helmet for coolness. The close-cropped head was like a boy's, too, gallant and spirited and proud. His old simile returned to him—as challenging as a sword.

Some of the natives stood in a chattering, gesticulating group about the open door of the hut. He ordered them away brusquely.

But a few, more persistently curious than the rest, returned. Busy, mischievous fingers pulled at the bamboo

that formed the hut's walls, and made holes through which round unwinking eyes stared at the white woman. Already, as he knew, they would be making a sing-song in her honour. Yes, from the far corner of the stockade by the cook's hut came the throb of the little calabash drums, the deep tones of the balaphones—and then a voice, chanting happily:

“She has come.—The woman has come.—She is white and beautiful.—She is like sun on the cloud.—She is like moonlight on the plantain leaves—like the moonlight on the white mountain top.—She comes to He-Who-Sees-Everything ——”

“That weird singing,” Joan put back her head, listening. “What is it?”

“Oh, ye'll soon get used to that,” old MacRae reassured her. “They're forever singing and yelling and keening about something or other. They're like bairns, or like monkeys, rather. Prying and inquisitive and mischievous.”

“They don't seem quite real,” Joan agreed. “Not like real people, I mean. By the way, I haven't seen Bimbi. Where is Bimbi?”

An awkward silence fell on the group. They had been waiting for this, dreading the question. They had taken counsel together about it immediately after Joan's arrival.

“If she thinks we don't know where Bimbi is, or that he may be wandering around somewhere in the jungle, she'd move heaven and earth and all the gods of Africa to find him,” Frank said, somberly.

They had decided to accept for Joan's benefit Schnitter's solution—that Bimbi, having removed the garments of civilization and Miss Leila's ordinance, had gone away for a time for purposes of his own.

Frank offered the explanation now.

"How odd!" Joan frowned. "I can't understand his leaving you."

"Oh, they all go back," MacRae said, and stood up to go into his own hut. "All the quicker, too, for the wee taste o' civilization they've had. It isn't in a white man to understand the pull and the tug the black man feels for the things o' savagery."

"But not Bimbi," Joan said, stoutly. "You don't know Bimbi. Wild horses couldn't make him leave Frank, especially"—she turned to her brother as MacRae went out of the hut—"especially if he knew you intended going into that awful Valley."

"I say!" Frank put up a warning hand.

"You'll have to be careful about mentioning that," Ned explained, hurriedly. "Two or three of the men here understand English. M'Bolo for one. He was in London for a while. And Kolak and Bartu speak English well."

"In London!" she shuddered. "Somehow the blacks out here where they belong don't seem half so horrible as those in London——" Then she stopped abruptly, held by memories she could not share with them.

She had kept her promise to James Shackleton. To all Frank's questions as to how or why she had come, she had replied in the same tone of gay banter. She was bored with Cranbrook and Aunt Leila. Derek had gone back to the Coll. The Glassenbury wasn't meeting. Dobby had gone abroad. Even Tony Ogle had disappeared. The thought of Frank and Ned adventuring in the African wilds while she sat tamely at home was unendurable. And the French air-mail

service from Paris to the Sudan offered a tempting way of escape.

But while she spoke, putting them off, and later while they took her on a tour of inspection of the stockade, showing her with pride the neat thatched huts, and the kitchen, and the screened central pavilion where the white men ate and sat together, her mind was busy with a hundred crowding possibilities.

Had Lord Sleugh arrived in Douala? And had James Shackleton seen him there? And what would be the outcome of that interview?

And Dornia Eleutherios? Where was she? Was she moving mysteriously along the jungle trails, intent on some secret purpose of her own? Dornia Eleutherios, who was like one of the beautiful exotic flowers of the jungle, whose beauty was a trap, and whose breath was poison and death.

When Joan had left James Shackleton at Douala, he had promised to send word to her, and to keep her informed of any events that might be construed as dangerous to the two men at the stockade. She had no way of knowing how or when that word would come. But when it did come, then she could make her decision about warning her brother and Ned Shackleton of Lord Sleugh's enmity.

"We'll make you as comfortable as we can," Ned Shackleton told her.

By his orders, M'Bolo and Kolak were moving Frank's belongings into one of the other huts, that she might have the hut that had been his. It stood next to Shackleton's. Kolak ran laughing to the end of the stockade where a moon vine had twined itself in and out of the bamboos and prickly thorns that formed the palisade. He pulled armfuls of the

sweet-scented white flowers, and strewed them on the hut's floor. The sing-song around the cook's hut continued. The drums had taken it up now, throbbing, pulsing, shouting the news through the forest to the nearest village!

"The woman has come—the woman who is like moonlight on the mountain peak—the woman has come to He-Who-Sees-Everything."

From far away in the unseen depths of the jungle sounded the faint echo of a distant drum. Africa had heard. The torpid black body was awake, stirring out of her deep jungle sleep, and crooning to herself. Soon, Ned Shackleton knew, the word would pass, from village to village, rapped out on the swift telegraph of the jungle, across the mighty dark continent.

"The woman has come to He-Who-Sees-Everything."

"How loud the drums are tonight!" Joan said.

But her ears heard only the savage intensity of those reiterated rappings. Her eyes saw only the darkness of the jungle night creeping close about the faintly lighted stockade; only Frank eager and laughing and enthusiastic about all the details of this new experience, catching her by the arm; calling her to look at this and this and this; "Lord! Jo-John, it is good to have you here!" only old MacRae, argumentative and garrulous—and Ned Shackleton silent and reserved as always, there at her side.

Here was safety and strength and the calm assurance of power. Outside, there might be the jungle full of menace and lurking dread, Lord Sleugh and Dornia Eleutherios, and those hideous nightmare figures who had crept upon her in the playhouse, but between all these things and her stood

now the strong log wall of the stockade. She drew a quick, deep breath.

Then her eyes came to rest on Schnitter, seated alone at his hut door, smoking and staring across the compound through cynically lowered eyelids.

To whoo—oo—oo! The thin, shuddering cry of the jungle owl! *To whoo—oo—oo!*

Joan sat up very straight from her couch of boughs, every nerve alert. The sound filled her with dread. It came again, twice, close to the stockade wall:

To whoo—oo—oo! *To whoo—oo—oo!*

She felt that she could not endure the stifling confines of her hut. She sprang out of bed and, pulling her long blue burnous about her, went out into the quiet compound. The moon was dropping down to westward below the baobab tree.

"Is anything the matter?"

Ned Shackleton was standing in the door of his hut beside hers.

"The owl wakened me," she said, apologetic for what she knew must seem to him a woman's foolishness.

"You mustn't mind them. They cry often. I admit it has an eerie sound at first."

He had left the shadow of the hut, and joined her there by the baobab tree. She noticed that he was fully dressed. "You haven't been to bed?" she said, surprised.

"No, I was reading—working over some notes."

He seemed loath to talk about his work. James Shackleton's words came back to her: "My brother is curiously reticent about his work. Most scientists are, you know."

Was that true? Or was it true only of this man who seemed to her now, more than ever before, to have deep wells hidden within him, reservoirs unplumbed.

"I was thinking, too," he went on, with sudden quiet intensity, "about your being here. The amazingness of it!" He bent his look, searching, half incredulous, upon her.

"Joan—tell me—why did you come?"

In the velvet quiet of the night, all need of pretence between them seemed to have vanished. They were man and woman alone in the heart of the primeval forest. She lifted her head proudly, unafraid. Her eyes answered his. She said, steadily: "I came because of you; because I cared what happened to you."

He bent swiftly, caught both her hands in his, and carried them to his breast. He leaned forward over them, looking down, but the clear frankness of her gaze did not waver. Then he took her in his arms. Their lips clung together.

It was he who spoke first: "You have changed the world for me! How could I have dreamed when we were there in London and we talked about all this—do you remember?—how could I have dreamed then that we should be together here in Africa—you and I?"

"I dreamed it," she said, softly.

"Did you? Darling Joan! Did you love me then?" He pressed her head tighter against his breast.

"Always, I think."

"I didn't know."

"You were so full of your work; all the things you meant to do," she said, quick to defend him even against himself.

He frowned slightly. "I was anxious about the expedition,

worried for fear it would fall through. So much depended on it. And I didn't have the money."

"And then you got it?"

"Yes."

"You haven't told me how."

"It came at the last minute. The morning after the meeting of the Scientific Society, a messenger brought me an unsigned note which said: 'From someone who heard you speak on Tuesday and is interested in science.' There were five one-thousand-pound notes folded in the envelope."

She leaned out of the circle of his arms, looking up at him. "Ned! How utterly fantastic!"

He stared at her questioningly, a bit disconcerted. "You mean that you don't believe me?"

"No. No," she said, quickly. "But what an amazing, fantastic thing to happen to one! Who could have sent it to you? Haven't you ever thought?"

He laughed shortly. "I'm afraid none of that mattered to me just then so much as the money itself. I took it like a gift from the blue—which it was."

"But five thousand pounds!" she repeated. "Who could have sent it? It must have been some one who loved you."

"I don't see that." He spoke a trifle uneasily. "Women never understand how impersonal a man feels toward his work. It's like a woman to think at once, 'Where did it come from? Who sent it? How was it gotten?' But a man's reaction is, 'What the devil does it matter where it came from or how it was gotten, if it serves the end?'"

She did not reply. His words made her aware again of something she had sensed before, a certain coldness in him, perhaps in all men of strong purpose, against which the

warmth of her own nature beat helplessly. Was that always the struggle between man and woman? Was man forever seeking to free himself for his work, and woman to hold him fast in a web of personalities?

"Joan, I talked to you before about my work, my hopes. Do you remember?"

"Yes."

As though there were anything he had ever said to her that she had forgotten!

"There's something more now. Something I want to trust you with before we go into the Valley." He put her from him gently. "Wait for me here."

He went into his hut, and she stood waiting there under the baobab tree. The moon had dropped below its boughs, the compound was in shadow. He returned presently with a small packet wrapped in oilskin.

"These are Marakoff's notes," he said, briefly. "My own notes, as far as they go, are with them. I dare not risk taking them into the Valley with me. I want you to keep them for me. Hide them in the thatch of the roof of your hut. Only you and I will know where they are. If anything happens to me ——"

"Don't, don't!" she shuddered. Her hands went out to him in the darkness. "If you knew how I hate the thought of that valley! How I dread it! It is the natives I fear. If the Valley is sacred to them, surely they won't tolerate your going into it! Mightn't they attack you, prevent you in some way?"

"I've forestalled that, I think," he said, quietly. "Of course, there's danger. There always is. That is why I am asking you to guard these papers for me. Whatever happens

to me, these must not be lost. They contain the sum of all my work. Much of Marakoff's, too."

"Marakoff!" The name struck across her mind like a chill and baleful wind. Would Marakoff be forever following her? Forever obtruding his sinister dead face between her and those she loved? But all she said was, quietly:

"You never told that you had them. Why?"

"Because if I had I would have been stopped. They would never have let me leave England."

The words rang familiarly in her ears. Had not Sleugh cynically pointed out to her just that eventuality? Already, the grim shadow of the Valley seemed to have fallen on them.

"I can't bear to have you go," Joan cried, despairingly. "Or at least let me go with you. If it is so dangerous, it is cruel to put me away from you."

He shook his head. "You mustn't make me weak. Remember it was the Valley I came for. I want its secret more than I want anything in the world. But there is something else you can do for me, if you will. I should go into the Valley with an easier mind if it were done. It concerns Frank."

"Yes," she said swiftly, half fearful of she knew not what.

"You know those dreams of his? What he hopes to find in the Valley? He is the only person in the world who knows the secret of using what he finds there, turning it into power and wealth. He is the only person who knows the formula that will make all those theories of his come true." He paused a moment, then added: "You see what I am driving at? If he is right, it is too great a risk. It would be too great a loss."

Joan's voice was very low: "What do you mean?"

"I mean, if he should not come back ——"

"Oh!" she cried. "But he will come back! You will both come back. You must ——"

"There is always the danger that we will not. Remember, this isn't England, full of little, safe things. This is Africa. It is another dispensation, a savage one. Only a fool refuses to recognize it. You said yourself just now that you dreaded the thought of the Valley ——"

He was pressing her hard, forcing her to face the issue from which she shrank in horror.

"You must get the formula from him. He would not give it to me. But I think you could make him. Women know how to do those things. You must get him to tell you."

"But why?" she objected. "Why should he give it away if he doesn't want to? Why shouldn't it be just his to keep, if he wants it that way? And if—if anything horrible should happen out here, then just his to the end?"

"Do as you wish, of course," he said, slowly. "But I've told you what I think."

She was conscious of a change in him, a chill. She put her hand quickly on his arm.

"Oh, I suppose you're right. Only I—I will go and get it from him now. Wait for me."

"He may be difficult, refuse to give it to you ——"

She lifted her head proudly, secure of her own powers. "No. I can persuade him. I know Frank will give it to me if I ask him."

When they came to Frank's hut, she did not speak, only laid her finger on her lips and went in.

He had no way of knowing how long it was before she

came out. He waited there by the baobab tree, hearing the whisper of voices in Frank's hut. Then she came. Her figure, only a shade less dark than the surrounding night, came close to him. She said, quietly: "I have it. He told it to me. I will write it down so I won't forget."

His arms went about her in the darkness, and she yielded to him with a little happy shudder.



Chapter Nineteen

THE OWL'S CRY

"A NEW dispensation." . . . Joan recalled the words many times in the days that followed.

The first high tide of her love swept her far away from the old dark fears which had accompanied her since that night when she had found the sign of the valley on her brother's bed. She was at times almost ready to laugh herself out of them, to discount completely Lord Sleugh's parting ultimatum. . . . "Which would you prefer . . . your lover or your brother . . . ?"

The events of the playhouse and the escape across the roofs to the security of James Shackleton's rooms, even the long airplane flight with James Shackleton to Douala, seemed beside this new, startling reality, like a dream which not she, but another Joan Merrington had dreamed long ago.

Only the packet of Marakoff's notes which Ned had given her, and which she had obediently hidden in the thatch of the roof of her hut, and the gold cloak in a locked dressing-case beneath her couch, were there to remind her of the fear which had driven her to Africa. She had not dared to leave the cloak behind her when she left England. She felt that while she had it safe under lock and key she held some unexplainable power over Dornia Eleutherios, perhaps over Lord Sleugh as well. What was it he had said about "cir-

cumstantial evidence"? Considered in that light, the cloak became a valuable pawn in the game.

Meanwhile, there was Africa.

On the second morning after Joan's arrival, while they sat at breakfast in the central pavilion, there was a loud knocking at the gate of the stockade.

"Open!" shouted Schnitter, and strode across the compound while Kolak took down the heavy bar. An Anjuni runner stood there. He brought for He-Who-Sees-Everything several slices of elephant steak, and an invitation from Bulawango, chief of the village five miles down the river, to come to a *conjo* that evening in honour of a mighty kill. Bulawango's hunters had brought in three elephants and a wildebeeste.

"The celebration ought to be worth seeing," Shackleton said. "Those native feasts usually are. We can go for a while and see the dancing, and leave before the orgy begins."

He had sent the runner away with the gift of a blanket in token of acceptance. That afternoon in two long canoes, with Schnitter, and MacRae who still lingered on at the stockade, they started down-stream to the Anjunis' village.

The mud and grass huts straggled in a double row along the left bank of the river. In the street between, excitement reigned; men, women and children ran back and forth, between the dais where the chief sat presiding over the feast, and the fires at the end of the lane of houses where strips of elephant meat hung from spears, roasting over the flames.

At sight of the two canoes a shout went up from the Anjunis, answered by the native paddlers. Bulawango in a topknot of parrot feathers, and a panther skin about his

loins, left the dais and came down to the bank to meet the white men, carrying the welcome fetish of two panther's teeth.

He led them to the dais under the sacred teli tree where sat his five wives, each one fatter and uglier and more heavily weighted with copper ornaments than her predecessor. A stool was brought for Joan and placed ceremoniously in the centre.

"You look a bit like a music-hall finale, Jo-John," Frank said, grinning.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," Shackleton assured her. "They think you're a spirit, *m'buiti*. They wouldn't touch a hair of your head."

"Old Bulawango's hand in glove with the French," MacRae said. "He trades them ivory and mahogany, and in return they let him do pretty much as he pleases, short of cannibalism."

"I wouldn't trust old Bulawango any too far in that quarter, myself," said Schnitter. He rolled the heavy black cigar between his lips suggestively. "Only, that he's got a healthy fear of the indigestion that comes of eating white meat. . . ."

Joan turned away with a little shiver of disgust. She was conscious of Schnitter's eyes following her; saw his shrug, and how he smiled knowingly, through lowered eyelids. She felt his unspoken comment, "I've always said it. Africa's no place for women." She lifted her head, defiant of the unvoiced criticism.

She became aware that one of the native women had separated herself from the staring group before the dais.

She had come close, stretching out her arm toward the white woman.

"That's the one they call Nguyla Mama, Gorilla Mother," Schnitter said. Joan realized with faint distaste that the German had appointed himself her guide. MacRae and Frank had joined a group of men by the fires. Ned was talking to old Bulawango. "She once suckled a young gorilla for Marakoff," Schnitter went on. "He caught the mother ape, and it died, and he got this woman to save the young one for him. One of his experiments."

"How horrible!"

Schnitter laughed shortly. His eyebrows went up, meeting his hair.

"Well, that's Africa! It isn't a pretty place. Precious few of your fancy London ways hold water out here."

The woman had reached her hand further toward Joan. She made little whimpering sounds like a dog who wants to make its presence known, yet is not quite bold enough to assert itself openly.

"Taken a fancy to you, *hein?*" Schnitter said. "Here you"—he turned blusteringly to the woman, lifted his hand as though to strike. "*Mufumbi!*" (Be off!)

At sound of his voice, Shackleton turned quickly. He took in the little scene at a glance, the native woman cowering, hiding her face in the curve of one arm, the other still reaching blindly toward Joan. He strode to the edge of the low platform, bent over, and spoke to the woman.

"It's nothing to be afraid of," he spoke over his shoulder to Joan. "It's just as I said. She thinks you're a spirit. She wants to touch you for the good it may do her."

Joan came to the edge of the dais. Nguyla Mama's hand reached upward and touched her arm above the elbow. Joan stiffened under the touch, but she did not move. The black fingers drew down her arm delicately, timidly. They fastened about her wrist. Nguyla Mama spoke again.

"She wants you to go into her hut with her," Ned explained. "She says there's an evil spirit there, and she wants you to drive it away."

"Evil spirit, *hein!*" Schnitter could not keep silent long. "All that native rubbish. Very foolish of you to encourage 'em in it, Mr. Shackleton."

But Joan said, quickly, ignoring him, "I'll go, of course. Tell her, please."

Nguyla Mama led the way across the compound. Her fingers were still tight about Joan's wrist. Ned went with them.

"She says I'm not to go into the hut with you," he said. "It would spoil the effect. I'll wait for you outside."

It was very dark in the hut. Joan stumbled over a heap of leaves, but the light from the low door showed the row of tiny wooden figures, the fetish gods of the household. There was a tray before them on which little heaps of rice grains had been placed.

The woman brought more rice. She put the bowl into Joan's hand, and motioned toward the fetishes. Joan sprinkled the grains very dutifully before each one. Nguyla Mama stood watching anxiously. When the last fat-bellied little god had been propitiated, she sighed gently, in satisfaction.

Joan was relieved to be out in the fresh air again, to find

Ned waiting, to suit her pace to his across the compound. Frank and MacRae joined them.

A shout from the natives about the fires, an answering chorus from the women . . . the *conjo* was beginning.

The drums began their savage thrumming, and the *griots*, professional dancers, with faces painted white and bodies adorned with leaves and feathers and streaks of chalk, leaped into the firelight and began to dance . . . chanting and shouting; stalking one another; crouching low in a circle, then leaping madly into the air with hoarse shoutings.

"It is the story of the hunt," Shackleton explained. "They are acting it all as it happened, before they sit down to the feast. Listen!"

Short, quick, staccato, the feet of the hunter warriors setting forth in the dim, jungle dawn; slower, deeper, the ponderous tread of M'bongo, lord of the forest, going down to the hidden black morass to wallow in the waters and feast on the red-pepper pods that grow there.

Now, a note of alarm creeps into the drum's roll. M'bongo throws back his giant ears; he is listening, listening. The dancers pause, their bodies drawn tense. M'bongo hears the menacing rustle in the jungle. The white herons circling above him, his watchmen, scream their warning, "There is danger, M'bongo! Danger in the forest! Hurry! Crash your way deeper into the liana tangle! Hide, M'bongo! It is man who is coming! Hurry and hide!"

Now the footbeats again; the dancers move forward together in close formation, stealthily, with bodies crouching low. The hunters are closing in, the green underbrush bristles with a hundred spears.

A *griot* lifts his spear, hurls it. There is the sharp ringing note to tell that the thrust has gone home cleanly behind M'bongo's eyes, and then the long savage bellow of the great war drums, signal that the giant quarry has gone down.

The drums were drowned by the savage shouts of the tribesmen. Bulawango lifted his voice in a stentorian bellow, which was answered by piercing shrieks from the women.

"Lord! I can't stand much more of this!" Frank moved impatiently. "Isn't it time to go? I'll stir up our men."

"I'll go with you," MacRae offered.

One of the *griots* stepped forward into the flare of the bush lights before the chief's dais, and began a kind of solemn chanting.

Shackleton leaned forward, trying to catch the words. "Can you make it out?" he asked Schnitter. "What is he saying?"

"Something about a goddess," the German replied. "He keeps saying, 'The Goddess has come back.' That's queer." He broke off abruptly.

"What is queer?"

"That about the Goddess. You know, that's what these Anjunis called the woman Marakoff had out here with him. He kept her in that hut of his up beyond the stockade. She went veiled all the time. The blacks got the idea she was a goddess. They'd bring offerings of rice and game . . . ivory, too, sometimes . . . and lay 'em before the door to get success on their hunts. Precious little of the goddess about that one, *hein*?"

He laughed his short, barking laugh.

Shackleton did not reply. He was frowning, and the

fingers of his right hand beat a light tattoo against the whipcord of his breeches. Presently he left the platform and moved among the dancers, singling out the *griot* who had sung about the goddess.

All Joan's old fears swept back into her mind. Was Dornia Eleutherios in Africa, then? And if so, what was she doing?

She turned lightly to Schnitter. "It makes a very romantic story, Marakoff and the Goddess. Do you believe she has come back to Africa?"

The man shrugged. "Perhaps. Why not?"

"But you know, don't you, that Marakoff is dead?"

"Yes. I have seen the papers in Douala."

"They were full of the case when I left England," she went on in a voice that she tried to make casual. "And there were all sorts of rumours afloat. Some people . . . people I knew . . . believed that it was a woman who killed Marakoff . . . a woman who had been with him in Africa."

"So!"

"Do you think it could have been this woman, Mr. Schnitter? The one you call the Goddess?"

He bent a sudden searching look on her. He laughed shortly.

"Who can tell what a woman will do? If she has found a new lover . . ." He broke off abruptly. "Mr. Shackleton is signalling to us. He wants us to go."

She was silent on the way back to the stockade as the dugouts moved almost soundlessly along the black waterway, soundlessly but for the subdued chanting of the rowers and the soft splash of the oars in the black depths. When they

were lifted, the phosphorus dropped from the blades like a shower of sparks. Their passing left a fiery trail along the river's still-running blackness.

Joan remembered Nguyla Mama's pleading eyes, the little whimpering note in her voice, and how her face had puckered anxiously. She thought, with a little sorry smile, if there was an evil spirit in the Gorilla Mother's hut, and if that spirit was Marakoff, she was glad she had scattered the propitiatory grains with solemn formality. She thought . . . if only she could exorcise the evil influence of Marakoff from her own life so simply!

Things had settled to quiet in the stockade when Ned Shackleton rapped on the door of Frank's hut and came in.

"There's something I want to tell you," he said, curtly.

"Well, what?" Frank, leaning over, unfastening his puttees, stifled a yawn. "Can't it wait for morning?"

"No. I'll be gone in the morning."

"Gone?" Frank sat up suddenly straight. "Where the hell are you going?"

"I can't tell you that. Only I'm going off on a short expedition . . . for something that I want very much. That'll have to be enough. And, I'm going alone. I've left a note for Joan. . . . Schnitter knows. He'll give it to her in the morning."

Frank's eyes, a little bloodshot, narrowed slightly.

"Something you want very much," he repeated, slowly. "You mean the Valley?"

"I'm not going to lie about it," Shackleton said, quietly. "In a way it concerns the Valley. Yes. But only indirectly."

Frank stood up. He came close to Ned Shackleton, his eyes searching the other's, trying to prove the truth of that assertion.

"You haven't forgotten our agreement?" he pressed the doubt home. "We agreed when we started that we should see this thing through together."

"I'm not likely to forget that." Shackleton's gaze met his squarely.

"Well, then?"

"I may tell you," Shackleton went on, ignoring the truculence in the other's tone, "that it concerns the ape. And the ape is strictly my affair. I'm going off in the morning. I may be gone two days. Meanwhile, you're to sit tight and look out for Joan. She can't be left here alone. If I'm not back at the end of two days, you're to send a search party out after me. I've already arranged that with Schnitter. They're to go up toward the entrance to the Valley. . . ."

Frank drew in his breath sharply. "Ah! So it *is* the Valley?"

"I've told you . . . it's the ape. Believe me or not, as you like." Shackleton turned on his heel.

"You fool!" Merrington's voice came after him. "You're not going alone?"

"Yes. There's less danger for me alone than if I had fifty men with me."

Dawn. Long, grey fingers of light, the smell of the day filtering through the jungle. And from just beyond the stockade wall, soft and slow but unmistakably clear, the long-drawn cry of the jungle owl.

At the fourth time it is repeated, a figure comes from the shadow of Shackleton's hut and goes stealthily across the stockade. It unbars the gate. For a moment, it pauses there on the threshold. The jungle trail is still wrapped in darkness. Then a figure blacker than the surrounding darkness steps from behind a tree. The owl's cry again. . . . Bakai.

Shackleton lifts his head and cries softly in answer. Then he steps out onto the trail and closes the stockade gate behind him.

The jungle owl's cry. Joan heard it faintly through her dream and stirred uneasily on her pillow.

Old MacRae, rolled sailor fashion in his hammock, slept too heavily to catch the signal.

Schnitter in his hut at the far end of the row was awake. He heard and his eyes narrowed. His lips pressed together tightly. He was thinking, and thought does not come easily to the Schnitters of this world. He asked himself again, as he had asked himself many times in the last fortnight . . . "Why? Why?"

In his hut, Frank raised his head from his pillow. That call, clear and soft on the first wings of dawn . . . was it a signal? The fuddle of the palm wine was gone from his head now. He went to the hut door, rubbing his eyes, staring across the stockade.

"He-Who-Sees-Everything has gone," a voice close by his feet spoke very low . . . the voice of the M'Bolo. He lay crouched by the wall of the hut where the shadow was deepest.

"The jungle owl cried, and he answered, and now he is gone."

"He has gone to the Valley, O Laughing One. It is Bakai who takes him there. He gave Bakai gold, much gold. Now they are gone. Will you let him go alone?"

Merrington struck out at him with his foot. "Which way? Quick! Can you follow?"

"There is a short way, O Laughing One. A way Bakai does not know. We can follow that."

The dawn comes slowly in the depths of the jungle. Night gives way resentfully before the day. Two men are walking swiftly, in single file, down the narrow trail. The black man leads, walking straight and proud like the tall spear he carries in his left hand. Behind him, the white man urges him forward. Presently they come to a small clearing where two trails, like the filaments of a giant spider's web, meet and cross and lose each other in the forest.

"Wait here," M'Bolo says. "Soon, very soon now, He-Who-Sees-Everything will come."

Merrington draws a deep breath. He is glad to wait, summoning his forces for that meeting.

Along the other trail there is a slight stir. Something is coming.

A tall black figure appears suddenly between the masses of green undergrowth. There is a white man behind him . . . Shackleton.

Merrington steps out into the trail to meet him face to face.

"So it is the Valley?" he says, slowly. "Did you think I'd let you go alone?"

Before Shackleton can reply, the underbrush about the clearing bristles with upraised spears. There is a wild yell, a rush, and a score of natives spring from the coverts upon the two white men.

"My God! It's a trap!" cries Merrington.

M'Bolo's hyena laugh rings through the jungle.



Chapter Twenty

DEPTHS OF THE JUNGLE

"UNBIND my hands, you black devil!"

Merrington bent his body and writhed, trying to twist his tightly bound wrists so that there would be less pain. But the tough liana ropes only cut deeper into the flesh.

For answer, Bakai drew his lips back over his teeth, tightened the ropes still more, first on Merrington's hands, then on Shackleton's.

There was a new torrent of oaths from Merrington. Bakai signalled the two drummers. The drums beat deafeningly, with a savage roar.

When they stopped, Merrington began again, livid with rage. Again there was the signal, and the drowning roar of the drums.

"For God's sake!" shouted Shackleton through their fury. "Can't you see! You won't gain anything that way!"

After that they trudged on in the narrow trail, not speaking.

Back of them walked two huge blacks with barbed spears.

Ahead of them, in single file, in and out of the jungle growth, went the twenty or thirty men who, at a given signal, a little while before, had surrounded and attacked them, and after a short skirmish overcome them. They carried spears and short axes. Powerful men whose bodies were striped above the waist with red and white. The left hand of each man was painted a bright yellow. In the lead,

the tallest and strongest of the warriors carried the native whom Shackleton, before he was overpowered and disarmed, had killed.

The black and coloured feathers of the natives' head-dresses moved, like huge live flowers, in and out of the dense green foliage of the forest. The thick lower growth of the jungle made little protesting sounds as the elephant-hide shields struck against its leaves in passing.

In the upper reaches, like ghostly presences, the morning mists were leaving the forest, feeling their cautious way along the branches with lingering yet hurrying fingers, and vanishing as through fear. What is this that is happening below in the secret depths of the jungle?

From time to time, evil and watchful or astonished eyes peered at them. A huge monkey with a black face framed in stiff white hairs leaned heavily on both hands on a wide branch and looked intently down at them, then suddenly climbed higher, stopped, looked down over his shoulder at them, and hurriedly scrambled higher still. Others, smaller ones, swarmed chattering, and made off in the upper dimness. A huge snake, lying lazily along an upper branch, raised its head, turned it slowly to this side, and that, in a flat, menacing fashion, and flicked its tongue. Once or twice grey parrots flew off screaming, showing their scarlet tail feathers. At a distance, a jungle beast crashed through the dense undergrowth, hidden, invisible, the sound of its retreat diminishing and melting, like a thing seen, into the depth and stillness of the jungle.

Once there was the far-off moaning of a horn. It reminded Shackleton of the melancholy moaning of the old rain-doctor's antelope horn. It brought to Merrington

memories of Joan's coming; the stockade negroes blown by fear as leaves by the wind, and crying, "A Spirit! A Spirit!" and MacRae saying, "Well, for the mercy of God!"

Both men knew Joan would not worry about them if they did not return to the stockade for several days. But what if they never got back? Africa alone for either of them, or with each other, had its problems and its difficulties and its horrors, but with Joan, Africa had now for them its desperations, its agonies.

Almost constantly, near or far, there was the beat of drums, drums answering one another in the jungle; vigilant drums; warning drums; communicative drums; announcing, answering, carrying messages, catching them and flinging them again far into space for other drums to catch and fling again, still farther.

Drums!

But above all, the frequent spitting spite and hate of the drums of the men who conducted those white men.

And underfoot, the voiceless, heavy leaf mould of the jungle. Centuries upon centuries of leaf mould; the mortal, decaying odour of it enveloping and clinging to them as they went.

And above all this the jungle towered.

It dwarfed the men as they made their difficult way. It made little or nothing of them.

Who are these ants who carry their dead and bind the hands of their fellows, and walk behind them with spears? In the vastness of the forest, what are they? Where do they come from, and toward what oblivion are they going?

On every side the jungle flows, like a sea. Hundreds of feet above, its waves face the sky, and roll on endlessly to

the north, where they crest and break at last in snowy peaks of tropic mountain-tops.

In the depths of that vast sea, what are these twenty or thirty black warriors with bright colours on their heads doing? Where are they leading these men?

"I told you," said Bakai in stressed and pointed English, waiting for them to come up with him, "that you would see the Sacred One. You will see him soon now, before the night comes."

They are bound and helpless. The jungle steams. It torments them. It tricks them. They stumble and are cut by the undergrowth as they pass through it. The heat taunts and tantalizes them. The sweat runs down their faces. It runs and drips from their foreheads into their eyes, and blinds them. The gnats and flies know very well that these men's hands are tied. They walk leisurely and arrogant over their faces, and swarms of gnats cluster in the air, and seem to sing in high thin voices, "Who are you great giants, that have no power over us; that cannot touch us!"

Merrington, as he stumbles on, has an uncontrollable longing for Bimbi; Bimbi, who for so many years has taken such care of his convenience, has stood ready always to serve him, and to save him every discomfort.

Splendid old Bimbi! If Bimbi knew! A hidden well of hate suddenly breaks and wells up in Merrington. He takes a bloodshot look at the natives ahead, and senses with a sense of pure hate the two who are back of him. If Bimbi were there!

Suddenly, with great vividness, Merrington sees Bimbi possessed of superhuman strength; sees him tackle man after man of these natives, single-handed; stabbing them

right and left; choking them to death; breaking their backs as Bimbi's father, a chief (that was one of the tales Bimbi used to tell in the playhouse!) tackled the leopard bare-handed, choked it to death, and broke its back.

That's it, Bimbi! Go to it, old man! Give the devils what they deserve!

Good Lord! Bimbi! You've always been there when you were needed! Nobody ever had to tell you! You always knew! And now! Think of your having gone back to your black world!

Why?

Because black Africa called to you, and you couldn't resist. You couldn't resist going back to hunt and feast and dance and drink palm wine, with a racketing lot of wild fellows like those at the *conjo*.

Why couldn't you have waited a while, Bimbi, or asked permission?

Merrington gives himself the relief for a moment of imagining Bimbi's return, and Bimbi's abject repentance when he learns. If ever he does learn!

"Never mind, old Bim! We all make mistakes sometimes! Everybody fails! Only, another time! And, Joan's been worrying about you, too."

Bimbi shakes his head violently. He goes down abjectly at Frank's feet. There never will be another time. He is overcome at the thought that Joan should have worried about him.

"All right, Bim! Don't feel so badly about it, old fellow! You're all right! We won't talk about it again!"

Bakai turns at this instant, and calls back, tauntingly,

"Before the night comes!" He laughs his hideous hyena laugh.

At that, new hate is released in Merrington, He raises bloodshot eyes and fixes them with hate on Shackleton's bound hands that are just ahead of him.

And Shackleton fixes his eyes with hate on Bakai, would fix them with hate on Merrington if Merrington were not back of him. For he is filled with hate now for Bakai, and Merrington, and the gnats, and the steaming heat, and the black men who surround them.

Uncertainty, torment, helplessness, and the hideous beating of the drums, all those have contributed, but above all it is the sombre, poisonous jungle. It is the jungle that has power to make men hate.

For, strangely enough, the jungle, so deep and secret itself, is not a place where a man may hide what is in him. Rather, it is a place where men are revealed to themselves and others; where a man's unguessed and savage and hidden emotions may peer out at him like gorillas peering from behind plantain leaves; where a man's follies and faults and hates go naked like savages, bare like the jungle-scarred bodies of the blacks.

Marakoff!

It was all this that Marakoff wanted to see. Marakoff knew! Marakoff was aware! Marakoff, who chose to study the relations between human and beast psychology, and who studied it with a secret smile, as the devil might smile looking on at those things which the devil would call "God's mistakes," thinking how he might build out of them power for himself.

"Marakoff! A rotter if ever there was one!" This thought

flows through Merrington's mind. "Marakoff! A master, no matter how terrible!" Shackleton is thinking bitterly! "The Great One! The Great One! He will help us to deal with the Lesser One, and with the One-Who-Laugh!" thinks Bakai.

"Soon now! Before night!" Bakai calls back again, tauntingly.

"Whatever made you trust that hell hound?" Merrington says. The full hate of the jungle is in his words.

"The same thing, perhaps, that made you trust Bimbi." Shackleton's words are sharp, and in them is the sting of the gnats, the hideousness of the heat, the hateful beat of the drums.

"That's a damned lie!" Merrington's voice is thick. He doesn't know what it is that is a lie, but he wants to say just that. Then he adds to it, "Bimbi would never get a man in a mess like this. And he'd never play a man to get a secret from him, either!"

Shackleton says nothing, but his eyes look hate straight ahead of him.

"White men talk too much!" says the native with the spear and the yellow left hand. He rolls the words out with a mouthful of fierce booming syllables of native sound.

At noon they rested in a clearing where once a village had stood, but where the grass grew now almost waist-high. The abandoned huts were mostly fallen to decay. A few still stood, but leaned uncertainly. The strange group of blacks seated themselves where the grass was matted down, where elephants had trodden and trampled it. The violent sun shone down without pity and beat its drums. Soundless drums, but quivering to the eye, more terrible than the drums of the

natives; drums which set the blood beating in the ears. They have beaten many a thing to death, the sun-drums of the jungle. To add to their clamour, one of the native drummers begins an infernal drumming to appease the spirits of men who once lived in this place.

Frank Merrington is thinking.

"I know a new torment for hell. The devil ought to pay a big price for it. Drums! Drums! The sun blistering you, and—damnable drums. If I could get my hands free, I'd tackle everyone of those devils, barehanded!"

Shackleton is thinking, gloomily: "I wonder if this is it! Marakoff's first abandoned village was not far from his hut. But, unless we've been going in circles, we must have left that long ago. The second village that he tells of in the notes was not far from the Black Caves. It seems likely."

The natives leave the white men rather to themselves, but Bakai, because he speaks English and because he is of his own type, stays near enough so that they may not talk together.

Once Merrington addresses him: "Where the hell you taking us?"

Bakai takes a piece of the strong, reedlike grass, breaks it into short lengths, stoops on his haunches, and lays these in a careful pattern:



As he places them, he says, "The Yellow-handed Ones want to see him who has taken the Yellow One."

Merrington turns to Shackleton, "What do you suppose became of the damn' thing, anyway?"

Shackleton stares ahead of him, brows low.

Merrington prods, hatefully, "For God's sake, what's the use of making things worse by getting sore?"

In a little while they were in the jungle again. It was good to get back to it, even to that mortal odour of dead centuries; anything was better than the torrid, intolerable beat of the sun's drums.

Once they skirted a mangrove swamp. A little stream had gone mad there, and felt its pathless way, in a sort of delirium of mud and ooze, in and out of the black mangrove roots. But it could make no progress. The roots were woven over and under, like a vast piece of weaving of the giant woman, Africa, who had tired of it, and left it there, going on about other business.

Once they stopped at a signal from the men ahead. There could be heard a breaking of boughs, then a tearing of them, as though branches were being ripped from the tree stems.

The natives stood still with dread.

"Nguyla! Nguyla!" they cried, "The Dawn-bringer!"
Gorillas!

A huge male gorilla, followed by two smaller ones, let himself down arm over arm from the branches of a baobab tree. The branches bent under the heavy weight of the beasts.

When they reached the ground they turned, rose into a manlike attitude, and stood staring between the leaves, their great bodies leaning forward from the waist, their hairy chests rising and falling, their long arms hanging down. Once the great male blinked twice very slowly and purpose-

fully, once drew back his lips and ran his tongue out over them and over one of his tusks.

Presently, without a sound, and like creatures in a dream, they turned and melted into the forest.

When they were gone, a great shout went up from the natives.

"It is a good omen! A good omen!" shouted Bakai beside himself. "The Dawn-bringer has shown himself. He came to look at the men we have brought! You are pleased, Dawn-bringer!"

The others took it up, shouting, "Dawn-bringer! Dawn-bringer!"

They took up their course through the jungle again, chanting as they went. They quickened their steps.

Once Merrington stepped on what appeared to be a long black log. The long black log raised a venomous head to strike him. The native nearest to him, quicker than the snake, threw his spear. The others rushed up. There was more shouting. Not only had the Dawn-bringer appeared and given them a sign, but it had provided them with meat for the celebration of their rites.

Merrington closed his eyes a moment, sickened, and after that kept them on the trail. The men ahead went carrying the huge dead snake. From shoulder to shoulder they carried the shining body, four of them keeping step, and steadying it as they walked with four hands painted yellow.

The drums beat now incessantly. They said: "We are coming! We are coming! Prepare for us! We are coming! We bring with us those whom we went to find!"

And, whenever they paused to take breath, drums at a distance answered them.

Bakai ran ahead a little. Shackleton, his face white and worn now, was able to speak warningly to Merrington:

"Don't complain. Don't argue. Do what they tell you to do. Keep as near me as you can."

Merrington said nothing. There was a sudden shouting that augmented and approached. The drums beat. The drums raged. The drums sweated blood.

A band of natives, the upper part of their bodies striped, their left hands painted yellow, rushed to meet them.

In the lead was an old witch-doctor, wickedly old. He wore black feathers on his head; his eyelids were painted blue, a band of red paint dividing his forehead, another of white circling it. A skinny hand beat against his breast a little box that rattled. Thick strings of fur dangled about his waist, and strings of bells about his body jangled. He peered into their faces under his blue eyelids.

"They are evil spirits!" he cried, jumping back and raising his arms straight and high. "Kill them!"

As the drums beat, the two men entered a rude portal made of two upright poles and a cross-bar. Ned Shackleton noticed that about the poles was twined the 'ngara, the water vine that is sacred to the gorilla.

At a little distance, and taller than the rest, both hands painted yellow and surrounded by another crowd of savages, came Chief Omanga.

"The hated ones are here!" he shouted.

Then a new voice, more terrible than the rest, rose above the others.

"The white men who would dare to enter the Valley are here! The gorilla god has delivered them to us!"

Merrington swung around, then stood swaying, dazed as a man might be when an earthquake cracks the earth at his feet and he finds himself standing on the edge of undreamed of blackness.

The savage man's eyes blaze hate. His hands, both of them painted yellow, are raised above his head. His lips are drawn back. He drops his head between his shoulders and gives the hyena laugh, then draws it forward with a jerk.

"The gorilla god has delivered them to us!" he shouts.
Bimbi!



Chapter Twenty-one

GORILLA GOD

OLD CHIEF OMANGA in the idol-house bent over again with more mutterings to the black idol with the copper eyes and the protruding iron tongue. He was much troubled.

As Omanga bent, the strings of leopard skins tied about his waist swayed forward; the dried black fetish hanging from a grass cord around his neck, the black hand of a gorilla, fell forward; the heavy copper earrings in his ears swung forward and down.

He had invoked the black idol's aid. He had called it to witness. He had passed his tongue reverently over its fat belly, that his tongue might become wise. While he made these obeisances, his subjects outside the idol-house drummed and shouted.

"We shall see the Yellow One! We shall see the Yellow One!"

"When the Great One took the Yellow One," muttered Omanga to the idol, "we sent Kanaka to care for it. The Great One said, 'When I bring back the Yellow One, the Valley shall be yours and you shall have the powers of gods; you shall have the power of spirits.'"

The idol made no reply. Omanga continued the story. He told it as it had been told to him by Bakai, Bakai upheld and verified, whenever the need was, by Bimbi, Son-of-a-Chief.

In the far-off country where the Great One had taken

the Yellow One, Bakai and the others had watched, but Marakoff never had allowed them to see it. Then they had sent the *monda*, the fetish, the little black god, to ask the Great One why the Yellow One did not return.

"They went to see the Great One. They went in the early morning at the hour when Nguyla, the Dawn-bringer, cries. The Great One lay in the stillness. The *monda* was there, guarding him. After that, the little black god sent the spirit of the Great One back to us. The Great One lives now in the Black Caves, in the body of a leopard. We have given him men to eat. When he breaks their bones with his teeth and laps their blood, he says, 'The Yellow One will return.'"

The old chief bent again. "Where is the Yellow One?"

And in Omanga's mind came the answer which he believed to be the answer of the idol: "These men whom Bakai has brought took the Yellow One. Torture them and they will tell you."

Outside, the members of the brotherhood awaited him, from time to time shouting,

"We shall see the Yellow One!"

Later, Omanga sat on the carved stool that was his throne.

Through the thinly-spaced wisps hanging down from the strip of long-haired monkey skin which he wore tied about his painted forehead the whites of his eyes and his scarlet-painted eyelids moved ferociously, like caged, savage creatures.

Bakai stood with his massive shoulders thrown back, his lean, powerful jaw jutting forward, his head lifted high on his short, powerful neck. Bakai—"Neck-of-a-Buffalo." He took his *assagai* from its snake-skin sheath and laid it on the ground in front of him.

Chief Omanga rose.

"It is not easy to know," he said. "Yesterday a voice spoke behind the curtains in the idol-house. It was the voice of the goddess that spoke, of the goddess who used to be with the Great One. The voice said 'Oh men of the brotherhood, you have never dared go into the Valley. Let these men go into the Valley for you. With them they will bring back great power and knowledge. When they come out, then it will be time to kill them, and to take their treasure and lay some of it here on my altar as offering.'"

"But," said Bakai, "how can you know that it was a real voice, for today it was gone? If it was the goddess, would she not show herself? Oh, chief! Oh, men of the brotherhood, I have returned from many moons' journeying. I know things that cannot be known here!"

The old witch-doctor approached Bakai with a cradling motion, that set swinging the bells and the thin strips of leopard skin hanging like a fringe around his waist. He rattled his box of charms.

Around about, their hands on their spears, the rest watched him with attentive, fanatical eyes.

Some one brought him a bowl containing a dark liquid. In the presence of all of them he drank the *mboundou*, swallowing and muttering, muttering and swallowing.

"Mutter!" cried the spearsmen. "Mutter and prophesy and tell us! You who have drunk the *mboundou*!"

All at once the old witch-doctor began to bound in the air to the rhythm of the drums, and the beating of the balaphones, and the blowing of the antelope horns, which were raised and lowered in rhythm with his leaping. Each time, as he leaped, he gave a cry, half human, half brutish.

the cry of anger of the gorilla, shrill and terrible, against the fierce accompanying cries of the natives. The natives swayed, too, in marked and obvious rhythm. At last the high bounds lessened. They became lower. The old witch-doctor, with half-fainting yells, cradled and rocked, stooping at last on the ground.

The shouts of the savages died. They awaited his word.

"I have consulted the Great One," shouted the witch-doctor. "They have evil eyes: Kill them! Kill them!"

Shouts rose again. The drums shuddered and crashed.

Omanga put up his hand. Perhaps the man-of-power, the witch-doctor, had more to say.

Merrington, his senses stunned by the hideous noise of the drummers and the shouts, sat in a kind of stupor near Shackleton.

"Now the old devil's finished haranguing the faithful, I wonder what's going to happen! What did the old demon say?"

Shackleton did not answer. He had risen. With a gesture he signified to Omanga that he wished to speak.

"You say that I must be killed because you believe that I can kill by witchcraft. How then, if I am so powerful, can you kill me and this man, my friend? Will I not come back and make life a sickness to you?"

The chief looked at him a long while, but did not speak. That was the danger in dealing with white spirits. They had power. Who knew how much!

But Bakai stepped into the circle of them and put up his hand.

"I have lived in the white man's country," he said. "They have no power such as you think. They eat and drink, and

go into the stillness. They even have great houses where they keep their sick and their bewitched. They have no power against the Great One. The Great One knows. The Great One commands. Do not be deceived, O chief!"

Omanga rose and raised his arms.

"Let them be killed! Let them be burned!"

The drums beat. The warriors began to sway in rhythm. Bimbi bounded into the circle and raised his two yellow hands.

"Let them be killed!" he shouted. "But do not be so soft of heart that you burn them. You have seen men burn. The smoke soon chokes them. They soon do not know or feel. Is it for such men as these to die so easily? Let them feel the fangs. Let them be thrown to the leopard. Let them be killed by the Great One. Piece by piece! A long time! A crunching! A tearing apart!"

"Bimbi speaks wisely," shouted Bakai. "Bimbi, Son-of-a-Chief."

"Bimbi, Son-of-a-Chief!" answered the warriors, shouting also.

Bimbi swung farther into the circle, and began chanting.

"This man was there that night that the Yellow One was taken." He pointed to Shackleton. "And this man is his friend." His eyes went ferociously to Merrington.

"It was this man's father," he went on, venom in every word, "who took me away to the white man's country. I, Bimbi, Son-of-a-Chief, went with him. I waited upon his children. They made a slave of me. I, who had walked high, walked low. There was a she-devil who used to clap her hands. When the she-devil clapped her hands, I had to do whatever the she-devil said. The brotherhood does not for-

get. Let these men be torn apart. Bakai knows and I know the white men in their country. Let Bakai lead these men. Let me go also. And let the others come with us to the Black Caves!"

A wild furore swayed the crowd.

"Bimbi, Son-of-a-Chief! Bakai, Neck-of-a-Buffalo!"

"Bimbi speaks wisdom!" shouted Bakai. "Let these men go with us to the Black Caves. There Bakai and Bimbi will deal with them, and deliver them to the Great One."

Without understanding their words, Merrington understood enough of their meaning. He turned away in sick loathing from the sight of Bimbi, Bimbi who had turned now more savage than the rest.

He closed his eyes.

The warriors meantime had swung into a furious dance, to celebrate the triumph of the Brotherhood and the triumph of Bimbi and Bakai.

Like brown leaves blown by a violent wind, they circled. The beaten drums raged in deafening, bounding rhythms—pride, ostentation, triumph, revenge.

The warriors' hands slipped up and down on the stems of the spears. They advanced, bending low, on the enemy. They raised their pointed axes viciously, as though they would throw them. Then they bounded back again. These men, their enemies, must not go to the stillness mercifully nor quickly nor with one stroke of the spear or axe. They must be torn apart, as Bimbi had said.

The old witch-doctor rolls two gorilla skulls into the midst of the warriors' dance. At this the warriors go mad, with shouts of: "Nguyla! Nguyla!"

They begin giving the different cries of the gorilla, work-

ing up at last to the horrible, unearthly drumming dawn-cry. Then, with hands doubled, they go on all fours; then they rise again, and drop their heads, eyes glaring. They incline their bodies forward; they run as gorillas run. One man foams at the mouth.

The balaphones beat. The horns scream. The brass and iron anklets of some of the men clank rhythmically with their leaping. Powerful feet spurn and scorn the ground. The ground is their drum. They beat upon it again and again in a tireless dance.

After a while the dance lessens to a rocking, rhythmical swaying, while one of the men sings the feats of arms of a former chief whose spirit lives in the body of a gorilla. At intervals the rest chant.

At last, when they have feasted savagely, and drunk, they sleep around the many small night fires, all save four or five men, Bakai and Bimbi among them, who stay awake to keep the fires fed. With the firelight on their faces, Bakai and Bimbi converse together, and sometimes Bimbi puts his head back and laughs.

By and by there is complete quiet except that from time to time there is the whine not far off of a prowling leopard. Once a little striped squirrel runs into the firelight, stops on its four feet, looks around, then, as though it had made a terrible mistake, turns sharply and bounds away, long waving bounds.

It is morning. Bimbi stoops and shakes Merrington roughly by the shoulder.

"Get up, dog of a white man!"

Merrington opens his eyes. Shackleton has not slept.

The blacks have gathered. Again there is the hideous beating of drums.

The blacks keep the two white men apart.

Merrington walks as in a dream, in the midst of the crowd of running, shouting natives who conduct them. He is hardly aware, even when they come at last to a huge opening in a rock, the mouth of the cave.

"It is for us!" Bakai says, proudly, motioning the others back.

"Stand back!" shouts the witch-doctor, his bells jangling. "They go with Bakai, Neck-of-a-Buffalo, and Bimbi, Son-of-a-Chief."

Old Omanga makes a signal and the drums beat furiously.

Shackleton and Merrington enter the cave; Bakai and Bimbi, carrying spears and pointed axes, follow them as though they were driving them.



Chapter Twenty-two

THE BLACK CAVES

THEY could no longer hear the shouting of the blacks. Through the winding passage of the Black Cave there still came the sound of the drums, smothered and lessened by the distance.

"At any rate," said Merrington, with just a touch of his old devil-may-care manner, "we're getting rid of the drums, thank God!"

The pulsing, uneven light of the torch carried by Bimbi showed Merrington's bloodshot eyes and Shackleton's face drawn with intense strain and fatigue.

As the four men passed slowly and uncertainly from the narrow, in-leading passage into the first spaciousness of the cave, there came the sudden whirring of thousands of disturbed bats. Thousands of wings whipped the air, circling, and as many thousands more, shadows of bats, flew with them, circling furiously and making a flicker of flying darkness. Some flew wildly round and round the smoking torch, so close that the flame stooped and shrank from the wind of their wings.

"At least," Shackleton was thinking, "when they took my firearms they left me my cigarette-flash. It may be of some use still."

At that moment one of the bats struck his face and held to it with frightened claws, a clammy spot of clinging blackness.

Shackleton tore it away and flung it from him with loathing, and as he flung it it caught the air again with its wings and joined the circling of the rest.

Presently the four men left the hollow chamber and came again into a low wide passage. The wet sides and roof glistened with a shifting glitter as the torch lighted them. On the floor of the cave, wide pools, if the foot touched them, glittered shallowly, or smaller ones, dark and untouched and unmoving, seemed to have treacherous depths.

Shackleton's mind was alive and watchful. Even when his eyes did not rest on the two blacks, his every sense was centred on them.

As they went they stooped a little, as men stoop who are ready to strike. Each carried in his hand the deadly short, sharp *assagai*. Each kept his victim a little ahead of him, directing him from time to time where to step, what to avoid.

But even so, Shackleton's mind, from a sheer habit of strength, was thinking of what it might be possible for him to do with his bare hands and his ingenuity. The two blacks in whose power they were were like magnificent brutes of a developed order. But even so, in the long race, had not mind always triumphed? Out of the very blackness of Africa, out of the very snake-pit of earliest savagery, had not civilization climbed and saved itself?

Shackleton remembered how, years ago, when he and his brother were studying under Marakoff, Marakoff had paused in his lecture and looked out over his audience—that way he had—and had said:

“There is only one struggle in the world—the struggle of man and brute.” It is true Marakoff had added to that, with

his secret, cynical smile, "Only one struggle—the struggle of man with himself." But Shackleton remembered now only that first phrase—"The struggle of man and brute!"

So, it seemed to him, under the stress of desperation, that presently he would deal with these two blacks and overcome them. Presently, too, when they came to it he would deal with the leopard of the Black Caves. That done, by sheer mental power he would in time overcome everything that had balked or detained him. He saw himself triumphing, saw himself getting Frank and Joan Merrington out of the way, sending them back to England, or elsewhere in Africa, and going on by himself, even if it were in the face of the very law of England, which might, for aught he knew, be stealthily in Africa at that very moment, dogging his and Merrington's footsteps.

So, he saw himself going on and on, in the face of everything, until he had the black Sphinx, Africa, on her brute back, and his hands on her throat; until he had wrenched the secret of the Valley from her. These magnificent, fantastic pictures succeeded each other in his mind, leaping into being in the shadowy, smoky flare of the torch.

"Look out, white dog, where you step!"

Bakai's voice barked its ugly warning. Bimbi held the torch low to show the way.

Across Merrington's numbed mind, jacked suddenly by new danger to momentary alertness, slid the memory of what MacRae had said about the deep, dangerous pits in the caves.

Across Shackleton's mind came a fantastically trivial picture—that old raven, Caleb Lipsey, in his long, black alpaca

coat, opening the door for Shackleton's departure—"Good-bye, Mr. Shackleton, mind the step."

The stones, from the increasing dampness, were more and more slippery. The men were obliged to go even more cautiously. From time to time water dripped in little streams on them. And once a draught of colder air, fresher than that of the caves, struck across their faces. As they went, they seemed to be approaching a thin veil of sound, like a soft but steady fall of rain. Then, as the wet gallery gave a sharp turn, the soft fall of rain increased suddenly to a steady subdued downpour of sound, the sound of falling, cascading water, falling, outside or above the cave itself—a muffled loudness that seemed to permeate the roof and the curved sides of the cave.

Then, suddenly, ahead, a long, hollow, reverberating cry that might have been the long-drawn miaul of a giant cat.

Bakai stopped. His lips went back. His white teeth gleamed. His eyes rolled diabolically. He turned his head to listen.

A long pause. Then, again the same cry.

The stillness afterward was like a terrible and evil thing; like a snake that coils itself tighter making ready to spring.

"The Day-sleeper!" called Bakai, through the cascades of noisy silence. "The Night-hunter! The Great One! The leopard! Marakoff!"

Frank Merrington turned, horror in his face. As he did so his foot slipped and he fell. Before he could recover himself, Shackleton was stooping beside him.

"Eat these!" he said in his ear.

He had in his hand now what he always carried in his

pocket, a few dark berries—what old Lipsey had called “the last resort,” the “key to the jungle.”

Merrington looked at the berries stupidly.

“Quick! They’re deadly! they are the end! Quick! There’s no time.” Shackleton thrust them into his hand.

But already a huge fist had reached across Shackleton’s shoulder and struck the two men’s hands apart and scattered the precious berries; then a diabolical laugh rang out. Bimbi’s!

Bakai stooped and thrust his head close to see what was happening.

“What were they doing?” he said.

“They are cowards!” shouted Bimbi, laughing again. “They wanted to cheat the Night-hunter! They do not want to go forward. They want to go into the great stillness quietly.”

“I will tell the Chief Brother,” said Bakai, but there was an evil, envious glitter in his eyes. “I will say, ‘But for Bimbi, but for the Son-of-a-Chief, these two cowards ——’”

There came again the strange creature roar.

So, there was an end, then. The two men went on, single file in the narrowing passage. It opened out suddenly into a wider chamber.

“Put your backs against the wall,” shouted Bimbi. Merrington tried to, but slipped and fell lengthwise.

At the same moment the torch in Bimbi’s hand leaped, and fell sharply, hissing, into a pool. Then utter blackness.

Then there were blows and a mad scuffling of feet. Then an unearthly scream and the metal clang of a knife crashing on the stone floor.

After that a long hiss like that of a serpent, the hiss of a man letting out his last breath.

Then some one stoops. Something is lifted. There is the shuffling of the feet of one who carries a powerful human body through the blackness. Then the body is thrown and falls heavily.

There is a moment of dead silence, then a rough purr and the throaty sound of a creature who feasts, and breathes raspingly as he feasts.

Then, feet returning.

Shackleton felt again in his pocket for his cigarette-flash, the last thing he had left. He snapped it on—a tiny spark.

The tiny spark showed him Bimbi bending over Frank and lifting him; and beyond, at a little distance, the tiny spark reflected in two great yellow eyes that blinked slowly like those of a cat.

The leopard's ears were back, little, flattened tents of wickedness, like those of a cat, disturbed, who watches. It stooped on its forefeet. Its shoulders were high, its head low. One paw held down heavily, mightily, the bleeding body of Bakai.

Suddenly Bimbi reached and snatched the precious flash viciously from Shackleton's hand.

There is no end, then, to Bimbi's ferocity—to Bimbi's blood-thirstiness.

Shackleton straightens himself for the lunge, and calls steel into his muscles. After all, there is only one fiend for him to deal with now, only Bimbi. So much the better!

Bimbi has turned the light on Merrington's face.

Then, before Shackleton can strike, he sees Bimbi lean

with an unspeakable tenderness, and lift Merrington's head against his shoulder.

Crouching to hold the still body, Bimbi looks up imploringly to Shackleton.

"You who know everything, save him! Oh, master, save him! I did what I could. But it is not enough. I made them think I hated him."

Shackleton stooped.

Bimbi's eyes had in them the hurt devotion of a dog.

"I am only a poor dull man, the son of a savage. You who know everything ——"

"Lift him up," Shackleton said, sharply. "Do you know the way out?"

Bimbi lifted Merrington as a woman might lift a sleeping child.

"Follow me, master. Keep your hand on me."

Before a great while, Shackleton saw something ahead, a wide glimmer of green light, crossed and recrossed like a stained-glass window, an opening to the cave, thickly covered with vines.

"Hold the vines aside, master, so they will not touch him."

Bimbi did not look at Shackleton. He kept his eyes on Merrington's face as a mother watches the face of the sleeping child she carries.

Outside the cave's mouth was a little clearing of grass. Bimbi, to whom was known every step of the way, rose. Again the anxious, doglike look of devotion.

"I will bring water, master."

Shackleton looked about.

He had seen this spot before. He knew it, but had never known of the cave's entrance. He knew it as the haunt of

the big grey gorillas. He knew there were water vines growing near.

Bimbi returned, bringing pieces of the vine, and began breaking the green sacks of cool water into his palm and putting it on Merrington's forehead.

Merrington opened his eyes. A look came into them like the look of a man who wakens from torment to peace.

"Hello, Bim, old fellow!" Then fuller consciousness returned to him. His eyes dilated, in a look of loathing. "You unspeakable, damnable, black devil!"



Chapter Twenty-three

THE LAW OF ENGLAND

WHEN James' Shackleton and Joan Merrington had rehearsed the various possibilities contingent on Lord Sleugh's arrival in Douala, they had always counted on dealing with Lord Sleugh alone, with Lord Sleugh as an individual, rather than as a representative of the law of England. It was with secret alarm, therefore, that Shackleton, waiting in Douala, saw the Earl of Sleugh arrive, for, besides the usual secretaries, there were with him two men who, though they had the air of casual tourists, nevertheless to James Shackleton's anxious mind seemed to represent official investigation.

Shackleton had already engaged his men and bearers in readiness. He determined now to leave Douala at once. As Lord Sleugh would in all likelihood proceed by the more comfortable but longer river journey, Shackleton, by taking the more difficult Road of the Spirits, could soon reach one of the villages not far from the stockade. There, without his brother's knowledge, he and Joan Merrington could communicate with each other and determine on the next step. They had agreed, when she left Douala, that, whatever happened, he would either send a trusted messenger or come himself to Marakoff's hut near the stockade within two weeks of the day of her departure up-river. The time was nearly up.

Joan's trust in her own power to deal with Lord Sleugh

had amazed James Shackleton. He had smiled wistfully at her one day, and called her Scheherazade.

Her sympathy and understanding, above all her womanly dependence on him, lighted his world in a way he would not have dreamed possible, but the very brightness of the light brought with it a corresponding depth of shadow. There were times during their flight from Paris, and in the days of waiting at Douala, before Joan could make the journey up-river, when he felt he could not endure the poignant misery of nearness to her loveliness and her beauty.

The hateful climate of the tropics, which had hardly touched her, had its way at once with him. Once she had bent anxiously toward him, noticing the shadows under his eyes and the sensitive whiteness of his face.

"I don't believe you should have come. I feel as though it were all my fault. I didn't dream you'd suffer so from this wretched heat."

He had replied, fixing the deep devotion of his eyes upon her in a way that startled her:

"It isn't just the heat. . . ."

After that he had risen and walked away from her on the beach, and stood looking out to sea.

When he returned to her he kept his eyes from meeting hers, and she saw that his face was whiter still, like that of a man who has come through torment. Hers was white, too. It was as though he had taken all words away from her. With a woman's sure instinct she knew that it was as she had sometimes dreaded it might be—he cared for her.

When the boat came, she had been glad to leave for Yoko and the stockade.

James Shackleton had held her hand in his for a mo-

ment, and kept his eyes on hers with an open hunger, as a man might who sees a whole bright world lost to him, passing away from him, leaving him alone and without hope.

James Shackleton's determination to join his bearers at once, avoiding an interview with Lord Sleugh, had, after all, somewhat left Lord Sleugh out of the reckoning . . . that gentleman having arranged, almost immediately upon landing at Douala, what had every appearance of being an entirely chance meeting with Shackleton.

There was, indeed, so much an air of the casual about the meeting that Shackleton was even hoping to excuse himself and get away when Lord Sleugh said:

"To be frank with you, I am quite interested," he watched his fingers rid themselves of an imaginary thread which he took from his sleeve, "in why you are in Africa at this time. You are probably well aware of my own mission."

James Shackleton's face flushed slightly. One hand went slowly up and over the heavy hair sweeping back from the whiteness of his forehead.

"May I say," he said at last, evenly, though his heart was swinging furiously, "that I am here for the same reason, I believe, that you are here." He leaned and flicked his cigarette carefully, though, as Lord Sleugh noted, there was no ash on it. "Because of the Marakoff murder case."

Lord Sleugh did not reply at first. Even in the mellow African light the lines of his face showed more than usually thin and hard. He did not look at Shackleton, but thoughtfully, instead, at a spot on the floor.

Shackleton was wondering: "Can anyone have cabled Lord Sleugh that she and I had come to Africa? But no.

He is completely surprised to see me. If he knew that I had brought Joan out here, he could not altogether hide his animosity. It would show in some hint of sarcasm, or in an oversuaveness."

"I am aware," Shackleton said, "that you believe my brother to be in some way involved in matters that concern Marakoff."

Sleugh replied coldly, and with a slight inclination of his head, "Yes, rather intimately involved."

"I have no doubt," said James Shackleton evenly, but still with a flying heart, "you have in mind that he left London rather suddenly."

Lord Sleugh did not reply, only waited.

"I don't know that it will have any weight with you," Shackleton said, leaning forward slightly, "but it was I who urged him . . . I may say strongly urged him . . . to go."

Lord Sleugh's eyes went quick and direct to Shackleton, then back to the spot on the floor again.

"I see," he said. "Since you have been so kind as to proffer that information, would you be willing to tell me just why you advised him to go?"

"Quite." Shackleton hesitated. "Yet, I doubt if you will fully understand. I doubt, I mean, if it is possible for anyone, who is not a scientist himself, to understand just how much a scientist's work may mean to him. I understand because I have worked with my brother, and I am a scientist, too, in my way, though I'm out of it all now."

Lord Sleugh was thinking: "Then that is what the white, underfed look on his face means! Imaginative, poetic, neurotic type; probably a disappointed, misunderstood scientist,

without money, but at least too sensitive, I should say, to be a fortune-hunter like the other one. . . .”

“We were both pupils of Marakoff,” Shackleton continued. “It was natural that I should understand, as perhaps no one else could, what delay in his expedition in this instance would have meant to my brother.”

Sleugh interrupted, quietly: “You believed, then, that he would be detained? You knew that your brother had Marakoff’s notes; that he had in his possession something that would have been of great value to the state?”

“I did not know when I advised him,” James Shackleton parried. “But I may say that, had I known, I believe my advice would have been exactly the same.”

“I see.” Lord Sleugh raised his eyebrows slightly. “I am to understand then that you would willingly have made yourself a party to the crime.”

“If you choose to put it that way”—there was a possible bitterness in Shackleton’s tone—“yes . . . knowing what I knew.”

Lord Sleugh waited.

“You probably have not thought,” Shackleton continued, “that the scientific meeting at which Marakoff spoke that morning has any important bearing on this whole affair. To me, it solves everything. Marakoff was so interested in my brother’s address at that meeting that he sought me out after the meeting, and asked me to ask my brother to go to see him that night.”

“Would you mind telling me,” Lord Sleugh interrupted, “the hour of your brother’s appointment? It is assumed he was there at eleven o’clock. Is that true?”

“That was the hour,” Shackleton said, without flinching.

"It was I who telephoned the message to my brother. It must have been then that Marakoff gave him the notes." And, as Lord Sleugh did not reply: "Only put yourself in his place. Suppose Marakoff had favored you. Suppose your own record was absolutely clean, and delay meant ruin to your work. Suppose you had a perfect right to those notes. Translate all that into terms of your own psychology. . . ."

Lord Sleugh smiled a wintry smile. "I see. But it is hardly on psychology so much as on evidence that such a case is built up. It happens there is a good deal of strong circumstantial evidence."

"If it were a question of that," Shackleton replied, quickly, "there would be others as well as my brother. . . . Take myself, for instance. I had luncheon with Marakoff that day of his death. I knew the hour of the appointment. I, like my brother, had been Marakoff's pupil. For the matter of that, he was fonder of me than of my brother. Why shouldn't I . . . impelled, let us say, by jealousy, have taken those notes? Why shouldn't I have killed Marakoff for them?"

"I don't know," Lord Sleugh said, coldly, "why you or anyone else should not have done all this. The point is quite simply that the evidence points strongly to your brother. There happens to be strong circumstantial evidence."

"Excuse me, sir"—James Shackleton fixed an almost tired look on him—"if you insist on quoting circumstantial evidence, there are two others I think to whom it might apply . . . your ward, Frank Merrington, and Madame Eleutherios."

A faint flush crept into Sleugh's cheeks.

"It is old talk, I believe," Shackleton pressed his advan-

tage, "a woman in a gold cloak at Claridge's with your ward that night. And if it were a question of a hurried departure . . . I cannot guess whether you know that Madame Eleutherios is in Africa now, that she flew here almost immediately after the murder of Marakoff, with one of her score of admirers. Who knows how much either of them may have been implicated?"

The Earl of Sleugh gave no sign of surprise, but the long, filbert-shaped nails grew white with the pressure of his finger tips.

"But a woman like that will go unmolested, I suppose," Shackleton went on, "not only because she is beautiful and unscrupulous, but because she has friends, I understand, in high places."

For a moment Lord Sleugh seemed to be tasting the bitterness of his own lips.

"Above all"—Shackleton spoke quietly, but there was an unmistakable bitterness in his tone—"the psychology of the situation is interesting—what Marakoff would have called the 'hidden motives.' There are, let us say, three people in Africa today, any one of whom by circumstantial evidence might be accused of the murder of Marakoff. Of the two men, one is your ward. It is pleasanter, of course, from the standpoint of your own psychology, that he should not be accused; it would be painful if he were. The woman's downfall might involve men in high places. . . . You, yourself, move in high places. . . . Pleasanter, too, therefore that she should not be accused. The only one to whom no pleasure-pain complex attaches is my brother."

While Shackleton spoke, young and passionate, to this

older dispassionate man, it was as though the ever-ancient, ever-bright sword of Youth flashed through the air.

But Lord Sleugh ignored the thrusts. He spoke without irritation.

"I am frankly not interested in that prevalent fad which you of the younger generation choose to call modern psychology. But I am extremely interested in proving a certain theory of the murder of Marakoff, a theory which relates to your brother, but I am equally frank in telling you that another interesting clue has, we believe, come to light here in Africa in Yoko. Do you happen to know anyone staying there at the mission guest-house?"

"I know nothing of Yoko," Shackleton said, coldly.

Sleugh rose.

"I shall be going to Yoko day after tomorrow," he said, "to follow up matters there. Meantime, I am glad to have seen you. Thank you for your frankness. May I see you again in the morning?"

Shackleton bowed stiffly. "Thank you, if you wish it. I should be happy."

When Shackleton was gone, Lord Sleugh sat a long time thinking. A neurotic young man, yes, and one calculated to give them trouble if he were allowed leeway. Yes, a dangerous young man, and bitter at heart.

He sent for one of his aides.

"You will see to it, Mr. Sibley, that the young man named Shackleton remains in Douala," he said, coldly.

Meantime, immediately upon leaving Lord Sleugh, James Shackleton took his determination. He believed Lord Sleugh had spoken of another possible clue at Yoko merely as a

blind, the better to carry out some shrewd manœuvre of his own.

Later in the evening, Mr. Thomas Sibley presented himself, rather white above his collar, and anxious, and official. Lord Sleugh looked up from his papers. He had left word he was not to be disturbed.

"Excuse me, sir," said Mr. Sibley, looking confidently at the toes of his shoes, and then rather anxiously at the wastebasket, and then more anxiously still at Lord Sleugh. "I'm sorry, but we've searched the town, except the native quarter. Mr. Shackleton is not to be found. Do you wish to have him looked for there?"

Lord Sleugh considered a moment. "No," he said. "You may drop the matter. Arrange so that we leave for Yokohama tomorrow."



Chapter Twenty-four

MARY L—

"Now, the scissors, Ranpano."

The black hand held them out. "Here they are, Father."

"Thank you."

The white hand took them, fitted them to its fingers, thrust them in and out of the tangle of carité bushes growing beside the path, cutting the flaming blossoms.

"The flowers are very sweet, tonight, Ranpano" (snip, snip). "The rains" (snip, snip) have done wonders for the garden. They are very bright, these jungle blossoms, very magnificent; sometimes, I think, a little terrible, too." The scissors moved in and out of the green mass.

"And now, Ranpano, the basket."

"It is here, Father."

The black hand held it up while the white hand laid in it gently one after another of the heavy-headed carité blooms.

"Take them to Father Anton. They are for the chapel altar, with Mother Africa's compliments. In a little while I will come."

From the veranda of the guest-house the American woman watched the little scene being enacted in the mission garden. A faint, slightly cynical smile played about the corners of her wide mouth.

"Quaint old dear," she was thinking. "Beating back the jungle with a pair of garden shears."

Then Father Hilary came up the veranda steps toward her. He relaxed gratefully in the bamboo chair at her side.

"I'm afraid you must feel the heat very oppressive?" he remarked in his gentle old voice. It was a voice that had no longer any surprise in it. Twenty years in a West African mission station had eliminated that. "Most newcomers to West Africa do."

"I'm not exactly a newcomer, *mon père*. And the Mission of St. Illuminata is a paradise after the native villages I've been staying in."

"Ah yes, I remember. Your aunt told me that you were out here to study primitive tribal customs. She told me, too"—he turned to her with suddenly kindling interest—"that you have been a student under Dr. Marakoff."

"Yes."

"Extraordinary man! No one knows Africa as Dr. Marakoff knows it. I look for him to come back."

"You knew Marakoff well, Father Hilary?"

"Not well, no. But he has stopped here once or twice on his way up and down the river. One doesn't like him." His fingers went to his crucifix. "I can even understand that there may be many who might fear him. An interesting personality, however. And very powerful."

("Ah!" she was thinking. "So he doesn't know.") But she made no reply to this. Her eyes had travelled across the compound to the river bank where a group of the mission blacks had gathered. They were calling to the men in a long canoe that drifted idly amidstream.

Father Hilary rose and went to the balustrade the better to see and to hear. From various doors of the huts around

the compound startled black faces peered, black figures came running.

A door of the guest-house opened violently and a young man came out on the veranda.

"I thay!" he expostulated. "What a beathtly racket thethe fellowth are making!"

A little troubled frown appeared between the priest's brows. "It is nothing in the least alarming," he replied. "The men in the dugout are saying that the Goddess has returned." He turned directly to the American woman. "This will interest you all the more since you are a pupil of Dr. Marakoff's. The Goddess is what the Bantus called the beautiful Greek woman who was with Dr. Marakoff in Africa several years ago." He sighed resignedly. "I must go and talk with them."

They saw him presently, a lean figure in a long white cassock moving with dignity under his cotton sun umbrella toward the river bank.

"I thay!"

Tony Ogle dropped into the chair which Father Hilary had vacated. "That putth me in the deuthe of a meth! I withh you'd tell me thomething"—he leaned toward the American woman—"advithe me, you know. You look no end capable and all that. Thould I tell Father Hilary?"

"Tell him what?"

The Hon. Tony hitched his chair a trifle closer, lowered his voice confidentially, "That Goddeth belongth to me!"

"To you?"

"Yeth." He nodded several times quickly in confirmation. "The flew with me out from Croydon. To Douala. Then we came up-river. And then the went off on her own. The told

me to wait for her here, the'd come back. And I have waited . . . ten dayth!"

He returned to his first perplexity: "Do you think I thould tell Father Hilary?"

The American woman's gaze was still fixed on the group by the river bank where Father Hilary's white-cassocked figure stood out against the blacks like an admonitory exclamation point.

"I wouldn't, if I were you," she said at last. Then, a moment later, "I know the Goddess, myself."

"Oh, I thay, do you?"

He snatched eagerly at the closer relationship this mutual acquaintance gave them, and hitched his chair still closer.

"Yes. I met her in that village of old King Bulawango's five days ago. Remarkable old man he is, by the way. But not so remarkable as the Goddess. And so it was you who brought her to Africa! May I ask why?"

"Well, Dornia—Madame Eleutherioth, I mean—rang me up and thaid, 'Tony, I want to go to Wetht Africa.' And I thaid, 'What ho, why Wetht Africa? Everybody thayth it'th a deuthe of a plathe.' And the thaid, 'Becauthe that'th where I want to go. And I want you to fly me out in the Fokker.' Tho I thaid, 'Right-o!' like a thhot, of courthe. Any fellow would. And we came."

"I see. You make it sound very simple."

"Oh, I'm really a jolly clever thort of a chap," Tony said, happily. He found himself liking this American woman with her laconic speech and her air of complete independence. "And I've really got peckth of thenthe. Only I'm not thuch a fool ath to thow it."

"Indeed!" Her level gaze swung round to him seated there beside her. "Well, if you have pecks of sense, then perhaps you can tell me who murdered Marakoff."

There was a moment of silence; then Tony said, slightly aggrieved, "I haven't dethided that yet. I thuppothe you've theen the latetht reportth."

"You mean finding the body of Marakoff's African servant? Yes. I read that. But Scotland Yard has dismissed that as a clear case of suicide. The lock-keeper saw the man throw himself into the Thames. Besides, Kanaka, the servant, didn't kill Marakoff. The investigation of that voodoo female and her crew in Twilight Street gave him a perfect alibi. He was there in Twilight Street the night when Marakoff was murdered. And all night. No. Scotland Yard will have to turn up another thread of worsted and start the hunt in another corner."

"Then you haven't theen the very latetht reportth." The Hon. Tony preened himself on his superior knowledge. "There'th another clue now. A woman."

"You mean the lady in the gold cloak?" The American woman flicked the ash from her cigarette as though to dispose, with it, of Tony's "clue." "She's not exactly a new possibility."

"Well, I thuppothe it'th the thame," Tony said, patiently. "Anyway, Marakoff wath expecting a woman that evening. The police found a note from her in hith dethk."

"But have they found the woman?"

"Not yet. But they're looking for her. They don't know her name."

"Then, I take it the note was not signed. Careful woman!"

“Jutht Mary L——”

“Mary L——,” the American woman repeated. “There’s nothing very revealing about that unless the note said something pretty conclusive. Do you happen to know what it did say, by the way?”

“That the wath in London. The’d come over from Othkoth. . . . Extraordinary nameth you Americanth have for your thitieth! And the wath coming round that night to thee Marakoff about thome articleth. That wath all.”

“Not very much in that!” The American woman shook her head disappointedly. “Articles might mean anything from bric-à-brac to a few diamonds.”

“The reporter chap who wrote the thtory thought it wath newthpaper articleth the meant. Thort of yellow journal-ithm, you know. Thowing up Marakoff’t methodth, and the ape and all that. And that Marakoff wathn’t any too happy about ’em.”

“Indeed! And he thinks this Mary L—— person from Oshkosh killed Marakoff? Why? What possible motive could she have had?”

“That’t jutht the point,” Tony persisted. “Everybody’t thought right along that the lady mutht have had a grudge againtht Marakoff. Thothe foreign men, you know. But, what’t to prevent Marakoff from having a grudge againtht the lady?”

He brought out the suggestion triumphantly.

“And you think that she killed him in self-defence?”

“It’t my experienthe, when a lady killth a man it’t alwayth thelf-defenthe,” Tony said, wisely. “Anyway, the houthkeeper thaid all along that the heard a woman’t voithe thay, ‘If you touch me, I’ll kill you!’ Remember?”

"I remember very well." She paused, apparently weighing this new solution which he offered. "I should say that you've built up a very entertaining hypothesis. Quite like a mystery story! Like most Americans, I have an appetite for detective stories."

"It would make a marvelouth detective thtory, thith Marakoff cathe," Tony said, eagerly. "Everybody thuthpected, nobody dithcovered. I've alwayth thought I'd like to write a detective thtory mythelf. Now, if I wath writing thith one . . ."

He got up and began pacing up and down the veranda, his hands rammed deep in his pockets, his chin sunk under the weight of concentration.

"Yes," said the American woman after a little. "And if you were, how would you write it?"

"Well, it'th my experienthe," Tony expounded his theory, "when you write a detective thtory, you alwayth put the thuthpithion on the wrong perthon. That's why, in my thtory, I'd put it on Madame Eleutherioth."

"Why? Don't you think the Goddess has trouble enough on her hands as it is?"

He made a short turn of the veranda before replying, "I don't know what you mean by that."

A rather grim smile twisted the corners of the American woman's lips. "No?" she said. "Then, I wouldn't begin writing detective stories just yet if I were you."

"Oh, come now," he was good-naturedly determined not to be offended by her brusqueness. "Who would *you* thay killed Marakoff?"

"I think I'll let you decide that."

"Well, then," he brought out his theory with evident pride, "I've deduced that in a detective theory it would be me."

"You?" She laughed shortly. "I see, your theory being that it has to be the least likely person?"

"I don't know why it shouldn't be me!" Tony retorted. "I know all the people everybody's been suspecting . . . Merrington, you know, and Ned Shackleton . . . there's lots of people suspect him . . . professional jealousy and all that. . . . Besides, I knew Marakoff. . . . I'm not saying how well I knew Marakoff. . . . But it was I who tipped Lord Thleugh off about the emerald mine Marakoff had in Ruthenia. . . . The old boy picked up the scent like a beagle. . . . I'd have Lord Thleugh in my theory, too," he went on, thoughtfully. "I'd have him come to Africa."

"I wouldn't, if I were you."

Her sudden intensity startled him. He turned a round-eyed gaze on her.

"I say! You don't think it was Lord Thleugh . . . ?"

"I know Lord Sleugh only by reputation," the American woman returned, evenly. "A very able statesman. But to go back to your theory of the murder . . . which interests me, by the way . . . do you think the lady in the gold cloak, who may have been the lady from Oshkosh, and the young man who might have been young Merrington or Edward Shackleton or, according to your theory, yourself . . . killed Marakoff?"

He nodded. "Yes, I do."

"And after that the two of them went off together, taking

the ten thousand pounds, and the notes of Marakoff's book?"

"Doethn't it look like that?"

"But the ape? After all, the notes and the money were easy enough to dispose of. But one can't get rid of a gorilla in London so easily."

He left off pacing up and down, came and dropped again to the chair at her side. He leaned forward, suddenly grave, almost solemn.

"Thometimeth," he said, slowly, "I've thought it wathn't a gorilla at all that Marakoff kept in hith third thtory. Nobody ever thaw the damn' thing. Maybe it wath thome kind of a wild man, awfully primitive, don't you know. Kind of miththing link . . . thort of chap. Marakoff kept him locked up, but that night he got loothe and he did for Marakoff, and took the money and the noteth and got away. Maybe the young man and the lady in the gold cloak were friendth of hith . . . helped him, you know. Maybe, he'll come out here to Africa to thtart a revolution or thomething."

"A very ingenious theory, Mr. Ogle." The American woman rose. She stood a moment behind his chair, not looking down at him, but across him at some indefinable point in the middle distance.

"What you tell me interests me very much. I suppose that's my nose for news. A newspaper woman lives on news, you know. And, like yourself, I knew some of the persons who seem likely to figure in your detective yarn when you write it. I shall look forward to reading your story of the Marakoff murder."

She nodded to him pleasantly, then went quickly down

the veranda toward her quarters, leaving the Hon. Tony staring mutely after her.

"I thay!" he whispered.

Toward sunset that afternoon, a shrill whistle gave warning of the approach of the paddle-boat from Yoko. She rounded the river bend and moored to the mission dock.

Under Father Hilary's orders, the boys brought the luggage of the three Englishmen who disembarked, from the steamer to the guest-house.

Lord Sleugh, walking beside Father Hilary, asked him, "Tell me, have you a Miss Mary Langdon staying here?"

"Yes, we have."

"Then I shall see her at supper?"

Father Hilary shook his head. "I'm afraid not. Miss Langdon and her aunt prefer to take their meals in their rooms."

"Precisely!" Lord Sleugh's lips drew together in a narrow line. His eyelids drooped. "In that case, *mon père*, will you ask Miss Langdon if I may have a few minutes alone with her . . . at once?"



Chapter Twenty-five

CHRISTINE

OUT of the horror and torment of that experience in the Black Caves, Shackleton had brought the conviction that through them lay a secret way into the Valley. The spot to which Bimbi had led them lay, he estimated, about one mile south of the great cataract whose thunder had reverberated 'dully through the massive stone walls of the cavern.

Midway of the caves, where the roar of the cataract had been loudest, there had come a break in the wall, a cleft some six feet wide. A thin flow of water had trickled down it, not evenly, but with the regularly repeated throbbings of water falling down a series of steps. It had seemed to him, too, in that moment that a breath of air fresher and purer than the noisome atmosphere of the cavern had swept across his face.

Suppose that the cleft in the rock wall was a secret stair, carved by nature or the hand of man, and leading upward through the bowels of the mountains to the summit.

The thought of such a possibility possessed him. He determined to return there at the earliest opportunity, taking with him a band of picked men, and examine the cleft.

With the change in the moon, he knew that the Gorilla Brotherhood would disband, each member of it returning to his own tribe, not to gather again for six months. The leopard . . . the sinister embodiment of Marakoff . . . Shackleton smiled, albeit grimly, could be disposed of with

a well-placed bullet. Leopards, after all, were a legitimate jungle encounter.

He, himself, had suffered only a day's nervous exhaustion from the experience among the gorilla-worshippers. But Frank, always keyed to a higher pitch, spending his strength in passionate rebellions and devotions, had suffered a complete nervous collapse. He lay now, white and spent. They had brought his cot into the central screened pavilion for coolness. There Bimbi tended him with the absorbed devotion of a mother to a sick child. Joan hovered about, tight-lipped and a little tense.

She knew nothing of the Gorilla Brotherhood or the Black Caves. Mercifully, she had been in her hut and sleeping when the three men had returned to the stockade, Frank a limp figure in Bimbi's arms. Shackleton had had time to warn Schnitter and old MacRae to say nothing to her. She had accepted without question Ned's story that he and Frank had had word of Bimbi and had gone to find him. Bimbi's reassuring presence at his master's side seemed to bear out the truth of this.

"I believe Frank is stronger today," she said, hopefully, as she and Ned sat under the baobab tree after waving MacRae off on his journey down-river. "The delirium seems to have gone, and those awful nightmare figures that he thought were pursuing him . . . they're gone, too."

Shackleton did not reply. He was cleaning one of the elephant guns, ramming strips of oiled rag down the wide barrel and drawing them out again, intent on his task. Presently he said, "I've been thinking, when Frank is well enough, that you'd better take him back to Yoko."

Joan looked up at him swiftly. "To stay at the Mission?"

"Yes."

"He'll never agree to that." She shook her head decisively. "You don't know Frank. His whole heart is set on getting into the Valley."

Shackleton shook his head. "In his present condition he can't possibly stand the hardships of an exploring trip like that. . . . Besides," he got up and strode up and down, "I didn't tell you before, but this morning Bartu brought in word that the Yellow Ape has been seen."

"Oh, Ned!" she whispered. "Outside the Valley?"

"Yes. Bartu said it was seen along the river bank above here. I swore him to secrecy. There would be a panic among the natives if they knew. But you see how important it is! I can't put off the chance of getting it. And yet, I can't go off on an expedition that may take days, weeks, even, and leave you here?"

She remembered James Shackleton's anxious words, "If you go out there, you'll break up his confidence and peace of mind that he needs for his work. His whole expedition may go to pieces. . . ."

He came close, and she made room for him on the bench beside her, "Everything in my future, all our future together, depends now on my getting into the Valley and finding the ape. I've gone too far, put too much into the expedition, to risk delay or failure now."

Briefly he outlined to her the conditions of the Masters bequest. "Old Cotterell virtually told me that the trustees would give it to me if I succeeded in finding the ape. If I find the ape, prove my theory, and so establish my repu-

tation in the scientific world. . . It would put me in the first ranks. It means everything—everything!”

“I see it does,” she said, softly.

“It means you, Joan darling.”

“But there’s my money,” she reminded him. He had her hand now, holding it tight in his own. The pressure of his fingers hurt.

“I can’t take your money! You see that, don’t you? Without the Masters bequest I can’t have you at all.”

How could she know that love would be like this? She had thought of it as giving, something that was hers to bestow exquisitely, as she chose, a royal largess. But instead, she found it a storm and whirlwind sweeping down upon her, filling every corner of her most secret being, possessing her, so that she was love’s, not love hers.

After a little, she said: “You’re right, of course. I’ll go back to Yoko and I’ll try to persuade Frank. Later, as you say, he can come back and try to find the way into the Valley.”

Her eyes went to the pavilion. She could see the edge of the cot, with Bimbi, the watchful, crouching beside it, and Frank’s bare arm hanging listlessly over the light-blue sleeping-cloth. With the aid of heavy drugs he was recovering.

“Poor Frank!” she said. “In this beastly climate . . .”

“I don’t think it’s just the climate,” Ned said, slowly. “Tell me, Joan, have you ever thought Frank might be worrying about something?”

She shot a quick, startled glance at him. She said, very low, “Do you mean . . . Marakoff?”

He nodded briefly. "I didn't know how much you knew, or might suspect."

The moment she had been steeling herself to meet had come. It seemed that she had known all along that it would come to this. She laid her hand on his sleeve. "Ned, tell me, do you think Frank had anything to do with . . . with that?"

"I've thought about it every way," he said, sombrely. "He and Dornia are friends. They were together that night. I dined with them at Claridge's. There was evidently some pact between them concerning money. Then, very late that night, he came to my rooms . . ."

She put up her hand, stopping him.

"Was he alone?"

"No. Madame Eleutherios was with him."

Ah! She thought she understood now about the gold cloak on Ned's bed. Dornia and Frank. Not Dornia coming to Ned.

"He was very excited. He told me he was ready to go whenever I was. I told him I couldn't go just then. I hadn't the money. But he only laughed and said he had enough for us both, and there was nothing to prevent our going."

"And you said you would go?"

"Not that night. But the next morning I got the five thousand pounds. Then I rang him up and said I would go."

Joan told him of the note from Dornia she had found on the back of the little map; of Frank's visit to Cranbrook in the night, and the pursuing figures. "They were the police, I'm sure."

He nodded. "I know. He told me. I didn't like the sound of it, though I asked him no questions. But I may as well

tell you that's the reason we left England as we did. I wanted to get him away."

Oh, it was all plain! Hideously plain!

In view of these facts, she welcomed the idea of going back to Yoko. There she would see Lord Sleugh. All her energies were directed now toward that encounter. If Frank in some rash and angry moment had taken Marakoff's money, the money should be paid back, twice over, if necessary. She would see to that. As to the rest, she knew that she held the strongest of all weapons against Lord Sleugh, that which would wound his own pride. The ward of Alexander Talcott, fourth Earl of Sleugh, charged with the murder of Marakoff. . . . Never! At the final stand Sleugh would save himself. And saving himself in this instance would mean the saving of Frank.

In the cool hush just before the dawn Frank awoke. It seemed to him, lying there, that he was more completely awake than he had ever been in all his life before, awake in every fibre of his being. The lassitude which usually clung to him was gone, dropped like an outworn garment, from which he stepped alert and tingling, and with every one of his senses acutely aware.

He felt curiously light, too, as though his body had shed its grosser parts; exalted, lifted into another sphere; and there was in him a consciousness of strength such as he had never known before.

He rose and, opening the screened door of the pavilion, stepped out into the stockade. A deep quiet brooded over the sleeping huts. Nowhere was there any sound, or anything moving. The moonflowers in the palisade glimmered

palely in the dark; their fragrance came to him, piercingly sweet. High overhead the tops of the jungle trees were full of mystery.

Now, all his former hatred of the jungle was gone. The deep forest that pressed close to the stockade was no longer alien and horrible, but a world his by long inheritance. He had denied it, disclaimed it. London had robbed him of his sonship. But the tie was stronger than civilization. He had returned now to his own.

He went to the stockade gate and lifted the heavy wooden bar that held it fast. The bar was an unplanned log of ebony and very heavy. It fitted snugly into the iron socket, but he was conscious of little effort as he loosened it. It surprised him that this should be so. But the sense of elation that filled him made this and all that came after quite natural and not at all strange.

The gate swung wide. From the gate a narrow trail led away toward the Road of the Spirits, a slightly lighter thread woven into the web of jungle dark. He was aware of something moving on that trail—a light figure—the figure of a woman.

She moved delicately and soundlessly along the forest path, and, though it was very dark, he saw her every movement quite clearly.

It was as though, while night held the jungle, she moved in light.

Her back was turned to him, but for all her seeming disregard of him he knew that it was she who had summoned him out of sleep and called him to unbar the gate.

"Dornia, old girl," he called, softly, "do you want me?"

She turned her head, and he saw her face then quite

clearly—the wide, candid brow, and her mouth very true and steady and sweet. Though her lips were grave, a little secret smile hovered about her eyes. He put his hand against the gate to steady himself.

“Christine!”

She was there just as she had been that last time he and she were together, smiling as though she were the guardian of a precious and delightful secret which she would share with him.

He laughed suddenly out of pure happiness.

“So you came for me? I knew all along you would. Come on, we’ll go into the Valley together.”

He moved with steady step out into the trail where she waited for him. As he did, from the dark shadow inside the gate a blacker shadow detached itself and moved stealthily after him.

“Guard him, Bimbi. Bimbi, never leave him.”



Chapter Twenty-six

BALL OF LIFE

As soon as Shackleton and his men had left the stockade in search of Merrington, Joan determined to end her uncertainty concerning James Shackleton and the movements of Lord Sleugh. The two weeks were up that day. She knew if James Shackleton himself were not already at Marakoff's hut, waiting to communicate with her, he would have sent some messenger to keep the tryst they had agreed upon.

She sent for Schnitter. The ex-trader listened to her command.

"You say I am to go to Marakoff's hut, to look for the brother of Mr. Shackleton?"

"It is a message of trust," she said. "If Mr. Shackleton knew, he would wish you to go. But there are reasons why I do not wish him to know yet. These reasons concern his work, which must not on any account be interrupted."

Schnitter worked thoughtfully with his finger nails a moment, then he seemed to put them away behind his back, where he allowed one hand to hold the other. He brought his head up.

"You send me to Marakoff's hut. Mind you, I haven't any fear, myself . . . not of the devil. But you know the tales of that hut. It must be a strange man, one with a devil's heart, or the heart of a saint, who would stay there."

With quick fingers Joan unfastened the little leather shield that covered and hid the jewelled bracelet of her

wrist-watch, and wrenched free the diamond buckle. Hauteur and severity were not things that would serve in dealing with a man like Schnitter. She put the little buckle in his hand.

"Please go at once, and bring him to me here."

Schnitter slipped the little glittering thing into his pocket in a business-like way, and went off to summon several of his men.

It was early in the afternoon that Joan heard the little five-note melody of the pipes and the beat of the drums that meant Schnitter's return. With him came James Shackleton.

It seemed to her unspeakably good and comforting to have him there. Schnitter had watched their meeting with open interest. That look between them! And the haggard look of the young man as he held her hands and looked into her eyes, which Schnitter interpreted in his own fashion.

He smiled cynically. After all, aren't women always women? "Take my advice, Mr. Shackleton," he imagined himself saying to his employer, "Women need some one always to keep an eye on them. Isn't that so?"

What a woman she was, too! She was taking that pale-looking brother of Shackleton to her hut.

At that moment James Shackleton was saying, in answer to Joan's anxious comment:

"Do I look so tired? Well, I suppose I am, though I don't feel it very much. I think it is that fearful feeling of being pursued. I had it every step of the way from Douala to the hut. Though I got away quickly, and my man knew a short trail Lord Sleugh's men weren't likely to know, still I

felt every moment as though their footsteps were back of me."

She made him comfortable, had tea brought, and told him quickly the events that had occurred since they had seen each other.

He questioned her concernedly about her brother's disappearance the night before into the jungle, but she would admit no real worry. Ned would overtake him soon. Besides, Bimbi was with him. No harm could come to him as long as Bimbi was with him.

"And Ned thinks your brother left to go into the Valley?"

"Yes. He feels pretty sure of it. Dear old Frank!" Her eyes filled suddenly. "We used to make light of his dreams"—she looked away, perhaps to the old days at Cranbrook—"but we believe in them now. I do, at least. Yes, and I'm sure your brother does, too. If he hadn't, he wouldn't have been so earnest about my getting Frank to tell me the formula, so as to safeguard it."

She put her hands over her face a moment, and then took them down. She looked at him and smiled.

"Do you know, I'm quite sure now that everything is going to come right. I was so worried, you know—we both were—about Lord Sleugh trying to turn the suspicion against Ned. But I'm sure now it won't be so. I've had a long talk with Ned. From what he told me, all the suspicion points strongly to Frank."

He looked at her, puzzled.

"And you're happy about that?"

"Yes, I am." She nodded. "First of all because it frees Ned, whom Dobby wouldn't have any objection to believing

guilty, and it puts the suspicion on Frank, whom Dobbie does object to finding guilty."

"But Lord Sleugh is as cold as steel," James Shackleton objected, "Would he spare your brother?"

"I know he's cold," she said, wisely. "But, you see, I've thought it out, this way. Frank has the formula. I've told you all about that. He has such faith in it. He carries it everywhere with him. Suppose he finds the Valley and all he has dreamed of. Who knows? He may even have found it by now. Suppose he has at this minute immense wealth and fame and power in his hands. . . . Don't you see?" She paused. "Lord Sleugh honours money and fame more than anything in the world. If Frank had all these things . . . that would weigh with Lord Sleugh. And after all, Frank is his ward. Even if Frank has gotten himself involved with a woman like Madame Eleutherios, it would be easy for Lord Sleugh to smooth things over. He has enormous power."

James Shackleton shook his head.

"What I see, my dear, is something quite different."

Something in his tone sobered her.

"What do you mean?"

"I've told you that I saw Lord Sleugh, but I haven't told you yet that he believes he has a clear case against Ned and means to follow it up. I didn't get much from Lord Sleugh himself. I saw Sibley, one of his aides, at Madame Martin's. He drank a little too much. Didn't remember the climate, I guess. I said very little, but after his first glass I got a good deal from him."

He went over the main points with her briefly. First of all, there was the matter of Marakoff's notes.

"Lord Sleugh knows that Ned has them."

"I know he does. It's my fault he knows. That's why I couldn't help being glad when Ned gave the notes to me."

"You have them now?"

"Yes. They are there in the thatch." She nodded toward the hiding-place. "Dobby won't think of looking for them there. And if worse comes to worst and Dobby won't listen to me, I shall destroy them."

James Shackleton did not argue with her. He merely told her more that he had learned about the investigation.

They had unearthed, it seems, among other things, the Masters will bequest. From old Jason Cotterell, they had learned that Ned had hoped he might get some advance from Cotterell & Cotterell. They had learned, from the same source, that Ned had at that time already asked financial help of Marakoff, and that Marakoff had flatly refused him. That disposed of the matter of the notes. Would Marakoff, who had flatly refused to help him, be likely to give him the notes? Furthermore, there was the ape. Wasn't it clear that the success of Ned's work, and therefore his fame, and if his fame then the Masters fortune, depended on his finding, and finding first, if possible, a particular kind of ape? That would account, you see, for the entire disappearance of Marakoff's ape.

He paused, and she said nothing, only looked at him with a wide, startled gaze.

"You see, my dear," he went on, patiently, the tired lines of his face showing deep, "they don't reason as you and I would. Their whole effort is to prove what you and I would give our lives to see disproven."

There was more still. It was assumed that whoever mur-

dered Marakoff must have had an accomplice. Of course, it was to Dornia Eleutherios that suspicion would most directly point, but it must not be forgotten, either—he spoke rather bitterly—that Lord Sleugh was one of her intimates and admirers, and would naturally protect her and himself.

“It is known,” he went on, “that Madame Eleutherios could control the ape, almost better than Marakoff himself, but it is on another woman, a woman who is now at Yoko, that Lord Sleugh expects to pin proof. And who knows, she may, after all, have had something to do with the whole thing?”

“Does Ned know her?” Joan’s question was quick and sharp.

“They think so. It is known that she was also a pupil of Marakoff’s . . . an American, too. They’ll make the most of that. It’s the last link in the chain.”

Joan put her face in her hands. James Shackleton watched her silently. When she lifted her face it was white, but full of clear resolve.

“They can’t prove anything,” she said, defiantly. “It’s only circumstantial evidence, after all. We must do something! Think!”

He put his arm along the table and leaned toward her.

“First of all,” he said, “we aren’t going to minimize anything. The danger is all there. Plenty of it. Strong circumstantial evidence isn’t a thing to be treated lightly. You might prove everything, and refute everything in time. But, my Heavens! at what cost!” He looked away sombrely. “Besides, you don’t seem to think of it.”

“What?”

“Ned’s work. What do you suppose would become of his

work, and his dreams . . . everything! . . . if all this wretched affair were dragged into the light? Clear him of it? Yes. No doubt we could, in the end. But what would have happened to him meantime; to his standing, his future, the honour and respect other men have for him? He's proud as Lucifer. Nobody knows him better than I do. Do you think even a woman's love could compensate a man like Ned for all that? Have you any idea what it would mean?"

He got up and stood looking down at her. Then he walked away as though deep into the paths of his own thought; then he came and stood by her again.

"My dear, there's only one way out. I've thought it over every way. You see, I haven't anything to lose, have I? Not a thing! I haven't any success. I mean I haven't any dream of a future. I haven't the love of the woman I love to look forward to. Why in God's name should difficulty, and strain, and loss, and sorrow come to two people . . . when one person could so easily make things right!"

"What do you mean?" she said, caught into the wildness and fervor of his words, but not into their meaning.

"I mean," he said passionately, "that if Lord Sleugh, after he gets to Yoko, decides to carry on his investigation against Ned, I shall turn the whole suspicion on myself. I shall make what purports to be a confession. I shall say it was I who was there at Marakoff's that night. I shall say that for some reason . . . I don't know yet what reason I shall give . . . I quarrelled with Marakoff. I can make it believable. I was his pupil, too. Give me the notes, give me the gold cloak, and you don't know how simple it will be. Especially with this . . ."

He took a folded paper from his pocket.

"Marakoff wrote me this note while he sat on the stage that day of the scientific meeting, and sent it to me. Look!"

He opened it and laid it on the table, smoothing it out with his sensitive long fingers and read it:

"MY DEAR JAMES SHACKLETON:

"Let me see you without fail.

"SERGIUS MARAKOFF."

"Come."

"I have only to put in the hour 'at eleven tonight' beside that word 'Come.' Nothing could be simpler, easier."

She rose and drew away from him a little.

"It's horrible . . . unthinkable. Nobody would believe you!"

"Yes, they would," he said. "I've thought it all out. Even the ape, too. It could be supposed I had taken it. It could be said I was after Marakoff's notes, his money, his favour . . . not after the ape. Yet, I can make it appear that I could have done that, too. . . . I could have killed it, skinned it, disposed of it easily in my laboratory in the Museum. I know all of this seems to you high-strung and morbid. It really isn't. Try to take it simply. Try to look at all the facts:

"What in the world is there for me to live for? It isn't as though I had a full life ahead of me. I've always, all my life, failed of attaining what I wanted. It was always Ned who succeeded. And then"—he paused and looked away—"you came. If you had loved me, that would have been so different. But what have I to live for, will you tell me? . . . loving you! I've been through some circles of hell, you

know, in the last two months. You wouldn't understand. A woman couldn't."

His eyes upon her; his white face in her vision; his voice, mellow with misery; these things touched and swayed her she would not admit how much. Instead, she shook her head and said, again, "Nobody would believe you."

"There is one thing," he said, almost quietly now, "that would convince anyone: If Lord Sleugh comes beyond Yoko . . . and I shall have means of knowing that . . . then when he comes he will find that I have killed myself! They will believe then!"

There seemed to her a sort of madness in his proposition.

She put her hands over her face. "Don't! Don't talk so! Please!"

He drew her hands away softly; stooped and looked into her eyes.

"Joan, have I made you suffer?"

She shook her head and could not speak.

At that instant the five-note melody of the pipes and sound of the beat of the drums broke upon them.

He raised his head, listening.

"They are coming," she said. "They mustn't find you. Stay here in my hut. You will be safe. I will go. I will send Schnitter to you. You can trust him. Soon, when the night falls, and while Ned and I are with Frank, Schnitter will let you out. He will send men with you. Meantime, promise me . . . else I shall have no peace . . . promise me that until I see you again you will do nothing."

"When?"

"Soon. Will you promise me?"

"Yes."

"You will not go away from the hut?"

"No. I shall stay there. Come to me there. But you promise it will be soon?"

"Yes."

She hurried away.

Already the natives were shouting, the drums were beating madly. The gates of the stockade were swung back. Ned was closest to Frank, almost supporting him. Frank looked liked some one who had returned from great danger, and had passed through great joy. His glance fell on Joan.

"I've got it, Jo-John!"

She ran toward him. "The Valley?"

"Yes, the Valley! Everything!"

The natives shouted anew, though not understanding, until Ned with a gesture quieted them.

"That's it! Gently, old man!"

Later Schnitter, when the night had fallen, managed to get a word with her. "Mr. Shackleton's brother. He wants to see you, only a moment. He is back of your hut."

It was easy to slip away. They supposed she was going to her hut. But instead of entering the hut she slipped into the deep shadow back of it, the moonlight falling at either side. Schnitter, who had followed her, waited in the shadow, but she paid no attention to him.

James Shackleton took her hands and stooped to her.

"Forgive me. Just this moment . . . this one moment! Mine! In all the world this one moment!"

He stooped and enfolded her.

The impulse to push away from him was stopped by a

flood of memory and misery . . . all that he had said and intended.

He held her close, a long moment, and pressed his lips long and desperately on hers.

Then he loosed his hold, turned abruptly, and left her.

She put a bewildered hand against the wall of the hut, steadying herself.

From the edge of the shadow came Schnitter's voice, reassuring and a little sneering, "Nobody saw you."



Chapter Twenty-seven

THE VALLEY

"BASALT, cinnabar, chalcedony . . . sylvine and carnallite . . . a new heaven and a new earth. . . . The building of the wall was of jasper and emerald and amethyst . . ."

Frank's voice, high-pitched and exultant, rose in an ecstatic chanting. Like John, he had looked with his eyes on the city of his great desire, and the glory of that vision filled him with a mighty exaltation. The false strength which the drugs had given him had carried him into the Valley. Now this strength was fortified by the heady wine of his success.

He could not sit still. He strode urgently up and down the narrow pavilion, talking, gesticulating. Words and phrases long forgotten came back to him, summoned by his need to give to these two, Ned Shackleton and Joan, the vision that had possessed him.

In Joan's eyes he read amazement, incredulity, a swift terrified moment of suspicion that all his talk of the Valley might be only a part of the delirium which had held him.

"It's true, I tell you," he burst out in hot protest. "It's all there!"

Shackleton, he thought, looked at him strangely, a little dully.

"There's a crevasse in the Black Caves . . . a narrow flume. It leads away to the left, upward. There are rough

steps cut into the rock. One gets up them fairly easily. It's a secret way into the Valley.

"My God!" he broke off, vehemently. "To think of our sitting here, never knowing, not suspecting, even! We might have spent months trying to get in over the cataract, or finding an opening through the mountain range to the south. Even if one exists . . ."

Shackleton had turned many things in his mind since he and his searching party had come on Frank and Bimbi in the grassy clearing at the mouth of the Caves. There Bimbi was nursing a torn and bleeding left shoulder that bore the dragging marks of a panther's claws.

"It sprang on us from an upper ledge," Frank had explained. "I had no gun. Bimbi had only his knife. Bimbi couldn't draw it. The beast was on us too suddenly. He grappled it with his bare hands, choked it, and fought it or until I could draw his *assagai* and get at the thing's throat."

Immediately on their arrival at the stockade Ned had cleansed and dressed Bimbi's wound. His fingers touched the mangled shoulder as deftly as a surgeon. Joan, standing at his elbow, ready with water and bandages, found her lips not quite steady.

"Bimbi! If you hadn't been there! Frank owes his life to you. And he owes you the Valley, too!"

After the wound was dressed they had made a bed for him in the hut which MacRae had vacated. One of the cook's boys was told off to wait on him there.

Bimbi, lying in the darkened hut, moved painfully under his bandages. The fingers of his right hand searched for and found the knot that was tied in his loin cloth. They loosened

it and fastened with satisfaction around a long, sharp panther's tooth to which filaments of flesh still adhered. He smiled in deep content. His master was safe. He had gazed upon the Valley which by the old, old laws none might behold and live, and he had come out unscathed. While he, Bimbi, Son-of-a-Chief, had secured a most excellent fetish, a panther's tooth. Bimbi could afford to smile.

Meanwhile, in the pavilion, Frank was telling the story of his great adventure.

"We must be careful not to let any word of this get about among the natives," Shackleton cautioned him. "Remember, the Valley is sacred to them. If its sanctity is violated, they believe all sorts of disasters will follow. They must not know where you have been."

"You're right, Mr. Shackleton. Can't be too careful." Schnitter nodded quickly in full agreement. He had joined the group in the pavilion. He stood, bare arms akimbo, balancing himself on his heels, swaying forward and back as though impelled by the surge and retreat of the tide of Frank's eloquence. But he was impassive as always. Only the glitter in his eyes betrayed any emotion he might be feeling that Merrington, who was a tenderfoot in the jungle, had penetrated the secret of the Valley of Creeping Men. "How did you find the crevasse?" Shackleton insisted. Merrington, he knew, had been too overwrought at the time of their adventure together in the Black Caves to look for, or to note the possibility of, a secret passage that might lead to the Valley. That he should have found this alone, by mere wandering chance, was equally improbable.

Frank hesitated a moment before replying. He fumbled for a cigarette and lit it clumsily.

The Valley, yes, he could talk of that, but that ethereal figure which had moved at his side along the trail, stopping when he stopped, going forward with him into the cave's mouth, even up the narrow flume, only to vanish when he came out on the ledge in the full glory of the dawn . . . of that he could not speak.

"Bimbi knew," he said, shortly. "He took the lead. He wouldn't tell me. You know how he is. I defy the Lord himself to get at all that goes on in that black head. But those steps up the flume were no surprise to him, though he'd never been up them before. I'll lay a quid on that. He dreads the Valley, Bimbi does, but he went up the flume one step ahead of me, and I could hear him muttering prayers and incantations every step of the way. . . . The stair is narrow, but the crevasse cuts deep enough for a man to stand upright. . . . It all seemed absurdly easy. I remember! I wanted to laugh. Because it was so easy, you know. . . . And at the top . . ."

His voice rose again excitedly.

"At the top you come out, like a damned ferret out of a rabbit hole on a ledge that runs along the inner side of the mountain. The sun was just coming up. Lord . . . !"

He stopped, caught up away from them and the place where he stood, by the memory of the prospect which that dawn had unrolled before his eyes.

"The ledge is about a quarter the way to the top of the mountain. The peaks rise all around it, sheer walls of rock thousands of feet high, all blood red and flaming, with streaks of violet and green. . . . It's fantastic, barbarous!"

He swung round on his heel, addressing Shackleton:

"I tell you I saw it across the face of the cliffs above the

ledge where I was. Streaks of blue and green. . . . It's all quite true . . . what the old chief told you . . . a ledge that glitters in the sun like the breast of a peacock. That night you told me about it in the Soho restaurant . . . I knew I'd move heaven and hell to get a look at those veins. Blue and green, like a peacock's breast. If it was there like that, blue and green in alternate lines, then it couldn't be anything else. And there was enough of it. There's never been more than a few ounces anywhere for laboratory experiment. Daubigné knew it in theory. He worked out his formula on that basis. But with enough—and with the formula . . .”

He laughed suddenly, as one of the gods might laugh, heroically amused by the consciousness of his own power.

“Well, the stuff's there! Tons of it! It runs in great shimmering waves across the cliffs. There it's been waiting since Creation Day for me to crawl up that damned flume with the formula in my pocket and turn it into power. . . . I sat there on that ledge, hugging my knees, and filled my eyes with it for hours. I said to Bim: ‘When I'm dead, I'd like to lie here. Then I'd still see it . . . blue and green like a peacock's breast. . . .’”

He was off again, using technical scientific terms that seemed to fall strangely from his lips. He had brought away a half-dozen small specimens of the rock, picked up on the edge, for he and Bimbi had ventured no farther. Now he spread these out on the table under the swinging lamp, and began studying them through a glass. He called Ned Shackleton and Schnitter to witness the clear veins of vivid blue and green running alternately in close waving lines through the rock.

"The stuff's as easy to trace as gold," he cried. "Only a thousand times more valuable. We've run the Philosopher's Stone to earth. . . ."

"Frank darling!" Joan bent and brushed a quick, contrite kiss on his forehead. "When I think how stupid we all were . . . how *mean*. When you talked about this at home, we never guessed . . ."

He looked up at her from his specimens, suddenly grave.

"Funny, your saying that, Jo-John. I was thinking about Cranbrook, too, just then. Aunt Leila. . . . She'll never admit she's surprised. Catch her! 'Just what I expected!' Eh? And Dobby . . ."

A little chill wind struck across Joan. She had forgotten Lord Sleugh.

"Dobby'll see." Frank's laugh had an unpleasant ring. "A treasure like that"—he pointed to the pile of specimens—"it's no little thing to put into the lap of old England. It ought to wipe out a column or two on the debit side."

He slept fitfully and dreamed of the Valley, woke and lay awhile in drowsy contentment before he slept again. Again he dreamed. He was lying on the ledge, overlooking the Valley, basking in the sun as he had used, long ago, to lie stretched out on the summer lawn at Cranbrook. He was filled with a supreme content. Then Bimbi, stark naked, with his hands painted yellow and carrying the heavy silver tea tray, appeared, walking along the edge of the cliff with the ease of a trapeze performer. . . . Aunt Leila's voice: "Panther sandwiches. I really prefer them. So good for bronchitis" . . . and Derek's quick, full-throated laughter. "Horrors! Bimbi's dropped it!" Bimbi and the tea tray

together whirling down, down into that sickening abyss . . . himself waiting, ears and nerves strained for the ultimate crash.

"But there can't be any noise in a dream," he heard himself saying crossly, and woke.

Not the crash of the tea tray, only a very little rustling noise outside the window of his hut. The dawn was beginning. The door and window appeared grey squares in the blackness.

"Who's there?" he said, sharply.

For answer a black figure in feather head-dress rose from crouching below the window, a black arm stretched through the bars. The hut was so narrow that the hand came close to his bed, close enough for him to touch. Palm upward, it stretched, the fingers clenched tightly over something. Then they unfolded slowly like some dark jungle flower. On the palm lay a clasp of wrought gold that was set with a green stone.

Frank half rose, leaning on his elbow. His right hand reached for and took the clasp. He stared at it a moment, dazed; then his recollection flooded back. Dornia's clasp! It was to be a token between them. "If ever I send it to you, you will know that I want you . . . very much." And his promise, "I'll come . . . old girl . . . through hell, if necessary."

Now the clasp in his hand. . . . She had sent for him.

He could feel the messenger's eyes fixed on him. Frank motioned first to himself, then to that other, and toward the door. The man nodded.

There could be no mistaking the summons.

Merrington dressed rapidly, buttoning the clasp securely

in an inside pocket of his shirt. He slipped his revolver into its holster on his hip. Then, with his flashlight to guide him, he tore a leaf from a notebook and wrote, hastily:

Dornia's sent me the clasp. I've gone to her. Don't worry. Will be back soon.

FRANK.

When he unbarred the door of the hut and stepped out, the messenger was waiting. He knelt swiftly, touched his forehead to Frank's instep, then rose and pointed to a slightly lower angle of the palisade behind the hut. He had entered the stockade that way.

Pausing stealthily by the window of Shackleton's hut, Frank fluttered the note he had written between the bars. Then he moved on, keeping close to the stockade wall to the corner where Dornia's messenger was waiting for him.



Chapter Twenty-eight

SECRET ENEMY

To JOAN, Ned made light of Frank's absence.

"He's gone up to the next village," he said, "on some errand of his own. He stopped by my hut to say he would be back soon. You're not to worry."

To which Joan had replied, "All my worryings about Frank are over."

There was a deeper meaning behind the words than Ned Shackleton could know.

Frank, secure in the possession of the secret treasure of the Valley, and of the formula that was to turn that treasure into power . . . what was it he had said? . . . "to revolutionize the world" . . . was more than an adversary for Lord Sleugh. Despite James Shackleton's forebodings, she was happier than she had been for many weeks. The grim spectre of Marakoff seemed to be fading away.

She sang to herself as she went about some small tasks in her hut. Schnitter, making his morning tour of inspection, paused before her open door.

"You are very pleased, *hein?*" he remarked. "That is good. Then you believe that your brother has really found a treasure in the . . ." he jerked a thumb meaningly.

"Yes, I do." Joan nodded with conviction.

"So! And when Mr. Shackleton will have found the yellow ape, then you will go back to England, and your

brother will have money, power, fame . . . everything, *hein?*"

His tone was mockingly familiar, and she resented the way his eyes went about the hut, seeming to possess all that was within it. But she stifled her aversion, and made her voice pleasantly noncommittal as she replied:

"It seems quite wonderful, doesn't it?"

"Yes," Schnitter agreed, heartily. "If only Mr. Shackleton is as fortunate in finding the ape." He made an awkward little gesture, half bow, half salute, and passed on.

A moment after she heard him cursing roundly at the cook-house boys for leaving a basket of yams in the sun.

It was nearly an hour later that an unusual commotion within the stockade drew her from her hut. Ned Shackleton was standing in the centre of a little crowd of natives. Bartu, the Bantu gorilla-hunter, confronted him. There was terror, and a kind of dogged obstinacy, in the native's face.

"*Oganwe, oganwe*" (I have seen, I have seen), he repeated.

"What have you seen?"

"Nguyla!" (The gorilla!)

Shackleton leaned quickly toward him; his eyes were riveted on those of the gorilla-hunter.

"What, Bartu? One of the dawn-bringers?"

The native nodded. He looked furtively over his shoulder, then dropped to his knees before Shackleton, and touched his forehead to the white man's foot.

"I fear," he whispered. "Some one has gone into . . . that place. The yellow ones are angry. Evil will come of it."

Suddenly tense with excitement, Shackleton bent over the crouching figure.

"Tell me," he commanded. "Are you sure, Bartu? Is it the new dawn-bringer?"

Bartu nodded without speaking.

"Near the stockade?"

"Yes, master. Very near. It was running close beside the trail. It is the Yellow One."

A great joy flamed in Shackleton's face. Calling four or five of his men, he gave them orders to prepare at once for the hunt. To Bartu he said, "You will go with me. When I clap my hands, be ready."

He went quickly across the compound toward his own hut. Joan followed him.

"Ned! Do you think it really is?"

He turned to her, startled for a moment, and frowning slightly as though he had just been recalled to the fact of her presence.

"Yes," he said, shortly. "I am sure of it now. I've had Bartu on the watch ever since that rumour of it several days ago. I must start at once. As soon as I have prepared the fruit."

"The fruit?"

"Yes. The bait for the gorilla, you know. The great thing is to get it alive, of course."

As he talked he had unlocked a portfolio and taken from it a small square box. She watched him open it carefully, that he might not spill any of the fine, yellowish powder it contained. From a basket of fruit on the table he chose three plantains, and with his knife slit the skins, drawing back the leathery covering to expose the yellow meat of the fruit. He made a sharp incision in each, and inserted a small quantity of the yellow powder.

She watched him, fascinated.

"When we locate the gorilla, I shall put these about where it is sure to find them," he explained. "The drug is very powerful, and quick. If the ape gets it, he should remain in a stupor for several hours. Long enough to give us the chance to capture him safely."

His hands moved swiftly as he talked. He set the drugged fruit to one side, and pulled out of one of the heavy packing-cases several coils of strong wide bandage, and a great net that was knotted of heavy ropes. He went to the door and called two bearers to take them.

When he returned to where Joan was standing, fingering the plantains, he stood a moment beside her, looking at her without saying anything. Then, "I'll go to your hut with you," he offered.

They walked together across the compound in silence.

Presently he said: "I don't like leaving you alone like this. I wouldn't for anything . . . But you'll be quite safe. Schnitter has perfect control of the natives. Schnitter's dependable. Bimbi's here, and I will leave Kolak to wait on you. He understands English. Besides, Frank should be back soon."

"I shall stay in the hut," she replied. "And I have my revolver. I'm not in the least afraid."

She put her hand on his arm, looked up at him with that beautiful, clear, shining frankness that was hers and which always threatened to overpower him.

He took her in his arms. "Joan! Joan!"

They clung together a moment, then quite gently he put her away from him. He went quickly down the line of huts toward Schnitter's. She heard their voices in a short

colloquy; then the two men passed her hut, going toward the stockade gate.

She heard Ned Shackleton clap his hands smartly twice.

What Joan did not hear was the urgent knocking that fell on the stockade gate; a voice crying, "*Akounga!*" (Open!) and Shackleton's surprised command to Bartu to drop the ebony bar, and the quick panting breaths of the strange runner who stumbled over the threshold into the little group of hunters.

"Ask him what he wants," Shackleton ordered Bartu.

He noticed by the man's head-dress of feathers that he too was a Bantu.

But before the gorilla-hunter could put his question, the runner dropped at Shackleton's feet.

"Nguyla! Nguyla!" he cried. And then, "The-One-Who-Laughes. . . ."

"Here!" Shackleton swung sharply around to Schnitter. "Keep the men back. Don't let them hear. All but Bartu. . . ."

And when the German had ordered the little group of curious natives out of hearing, "Now, Bartu, tell this man to speak quickly. What is this about The-One-Who-Laughes?"

The runner's story was soon told. The Goddess resting in the village of the Evilis had sent him to the stockade before dawn. He was to find the Laughing One and show him the shining thing. He was to bring him quickly by the Road of the Spirits to the village of the Evilis.

But as they went by the Road of the Spirits, suddenly a gorilla, that was like no dawn-bringer he had ever seen before, light in colour . . .

The runner began to tremble.

"*Gott in Himmel!*" Schnitter whispered. "The Yellow One . . . after all!"

"Go on!" Shackleton commanded through set lips.

"The gorilla fell on the Laughing One. It twisted his arms so he could not reach his gun. It threw him on the rocks beside the trail."

"My God!" Schnitter cried. "It's killed him!"

The runner had been terrified. He had run down the trail, giving the Bantu call for help. And help had come. A party of men whom the Goddess had sent out to meet them heard the call and came running. At sight of them the Yellow One had made off into the jungle. The men had carried the Laughing One into the village of the Evilis. He was there now. . . .

"I'll go at once," said Shackleton. "God! If it's not too late!" His deeply tanned face looked suddenly drawn and haggard. He issued his commands sharply. He said to Schnitter:

"See that none of this gets to Miss Merrington. She must not suspect. Put extra guards along the stockade wall."

Schnitter nodded quickly, comprehendingly.

"I'll make everything safe. *Gott!*" he moistened his lips with his tongue, ran a fat hand around his neck inside his open shirt collar. "For it to attack a man like that!"

Shackleton made no reply. He called Kolak and said to him:

"You will remain here in the stockade. You will watch for the Yellow One. If it comes, you will leave these"—he gave him the plantains into which he had put the drug—"where the Yellow One may find them. Do you understand?"

"I understand," Kolak repeated. "Master, it shall be as you say."

"Now!" Shackleton turned to the runner. "Take me to him quickly."

He would have gone at once but Schnitter put up a detaining hand. He pointed. "Look!"

Bimbi was standing in the door of the hut that had been MacRae's. The white bandages about his shoulders stood out with startling significance. His face was lifted above them, with a tense, listening look that seemed not to be directed toward Shackleton and the Bantu runner by the stockade gate, but toward some point far distant . . . through the jungle. As though the jungle itself gave warning to Bimbi, who had returned to it.

Then as Shackleton watched him, Bimbi's eyes turned away from the jungle, came to rest on that group by the gate. He left the shadow of the hut. He came across the courtyard toward them, walking proudly, with the dignity of those on whom the tragic mantle has fallen.

"No, Bimbi, not this time."

Shackleton tried to say it. But Bimbi had laid a hand on his arm, not importunately, but as an equal who asserts that which is his right, and in the full confidence that that right will be respected.

"Take me to him," he said, simply. "He is mine."

Shackleton made a little gesture of acquiescence. He motioned Bartu to open the gate. The blacks fell back, waiting.

"To the village of the Evilis," Shackleton said to the runner, "as quickly as you can."

He and Bimbi at the head of the band of spearmen followed the runner out into the jungle.

For Joan, alone in her hut, the morning went by more quickly than usual. Toward noon she lay down in her hammock to escape the intense heat that blazed on the baked dirt floor of the compound, and which danced in shimmering waves over the thatched roofs of the huts. The straw gave forth a pleasant dry sweetness that called to her memory lazy June days in England . . . haying time, the clean whirring sound of the reaper on the river meadows, and the creak of the heavy wooden wains as they brought their high-piled loads to the barns. As children, she and Frank and Derek had loved to ride on the hay loads, standing knee deep in the grass, balancing themselves with the hay forks against the wagon's violent lurchings, like young Tritons.

Next June . . .

Her thoughts ran ahead, and became lost in a delicious reverie. She dozed and woke, wondering first whether Frank had returned, then about Ned.

When Kolak slipped silently in at the door, bringing her a tray of fruit, she tried to question him. But he shook his head to her questions. He waited on her deftly, then disappeared.

The stockade was very quiet. Even the drums were silent.

Later in the afternoon a bulky shadow darkened the doorway. She looked up to see Schnitter standing there as he had stood earlier that day.

"Mr. Shackleton is not back yet," he said.

"He said he might be gone for some time," Joan replied.

"But you are not afraid?"

"No."

She said it quietly, believing the truth of her assertion. But as she spoke she became conscious of a fear that was hidden deep within her. It grew, assumed recognizable proportions.

"So!"

He looked at her a moment strangely, then he stepped into the hut. He came to the table and took up and examined a native gourd that lay there. Joan's revolver lay beside it.

His hand reached over, took the revolver. Keeping his eyes on her and smiling faintly all the while, he slipped it into his pocket.

"He trusts me very much, Mr. Shackleton," he said. "He leaves you with me. You trust me, too, *hein?*"

She drew back, away from the table, every nerve tense. The fright that seized her was like some great black figure that pinioned her arms and laid its hand over her lips. She realized her loneliness in a great flash of bewilderment and terror. There was no one in the stockade to help her if she called. Schnitter, she knew, had the natives completely in his control. Kolak would obey him absolutely. Bimbi—yes, Bimbi was there to defend her. But Schnitter was armed, and she knew, too, that he would not hesitate to shoot if he was balked in his designs.

Only her wits would save her now.

Schnitter was cruel; he was powerful, but he was greedy, too, and avaricious. She remembered how his eyes had glittered when she gave him the diamond buckle. With what bitter envy he had spoken that morning of Frank's finding the treasure in the Valley! If she could hold out something

to him that was so valuable that for the sake of it he would let her go. . . .

"I do trust you, Mr. Schnitter," she said. Her voice was steady, although her heart hammered. "I trust you very much. So much that I am going to ask you to do something for me."

"Yes," he said slowly, still looking at her with that lazy, confident smile. "What is that?"

"You heard my brother tell about the Valley and what he found there. You know he has a formula which is the key to that wealth. He and I are the only ones who know it. He gave the secret to me."

She could see that interested him. The smile faded a little. It was supplanted in his eyes by a look of cunning.

"And you will give it to me, *hein*?" he said. He put his hand across the table toward her. The silver bracelet about his wrist glittered malevolently.

"That's what I wanted to ask you," she went on, trying desperately to keep her voice from shaking. "I wanted to ask you to get the formula for me."

He frowned. "To get it? Where is it?"

"I hid it," she said.

"You hid it? Where?"

"That night we went to the *conjo*. When I went into the hut the woman they call the Gorilla Mother . . ."

She stopped, looked to him for confirmation.

He nodded. "I remember."

"I left a little box on the shelf before her idol. The formula is in it. The formula that is to make my brother the richest, the most powerful man in England."

He stood still, looking at her, his chin lowered on his

chest so that he seemed to be staring at her from underneath the weight of his own dark thoughts.

She read suspicion in his eyes.

"That's a likely story," he sneered. "Why should you do that?"

"Because I dared not leave the formula here," she said, desperately. "I was afraid. It is so very valuable, you see. Some one might steal it or try to get it from me. I thought there would be an opportunity before now to send word to my friend in Marakoff's hut, and he would get it. But Mr. Shackleton was always about. . . ."

He gave vent to a short harsh laugh.

"So!" The insinuation in his tone made her wince. "You do not trust Mr. Shackleton? It is that other one—in Marakoff's hut—the one back of your hut that night. . . ."

He brought his clenched fist down on the table between them.

"You sent me for him. You paid me to bring him to you here. But not any more. I am not a man to do errands like a dog, with no reward but 'Please, Mr. Schnitter. Thank you, Mr. Schnitter.'" He mimicked her tone. "I want more than that."

Joan's eyes met his without flinching.

"Only go quickly and bring me the formula," she said, evenly. "When you come back, you shall have your reward."

She saw him hesitate while he weighed the promise of her words.

Then he laughed again shortly, turned to the door. At the threshold, he swung round on his heel and held her with a long look.

"If you have tricked me I will make you pay!"

Alone in the hut, Joan pressed both hands against her breast to still the wild beating of her heart.

Schnitter was gone. But he would come back, ten times more dangerous for the knowledge that she had tricked him.

She had a sense of the jungle stretching all about her and of her sudden, complete aloneness.

Then, like a light in darkness, came the thought of James Shackleton. He had promised not to leave Marakoff's hut without letting her know. She would go to him there.



Chapter Twenty-nine

THE GODDESS SPEAKS

As SHACKLETON and his party emerged from the jungle trail and stood on the edge of the ravine wherein lay the village of the Evilis, a portentous silence brooded over the cluster of mud huts by the river.

Here, close to its headwaters, the Sanaga was a narrow sluggish stream. Opposite stretched the wild jungle. The village itself, dark and breathing a hot humidity, nestled against high cliffs that rose from the river bank, outposts of the mountains that guarded the secret of the Valley of Creeping Men.

The runner paused. He cupped his hands about his mouth and shouted: "We come. We are friends. Bid us welcome."

But from the village below came no response. There was no answering beat of drums. No one came running.

The runner cried again: "We come. We are friends. . . ."

"No matter." Shackleton stopped him. "Quick. Where is The-One-Who-Laugh?"

"Follow."

The Bantu guided him down the steep side of the ravine and led the way between the double row of huts. The doors stood wide, but still there was no sound of voices, no sign of life, save at one door where a child peered curiously around the doorpost at the strangers. Then a hand reached out from the darkness within the hut. It seized the child by the arm and drew it back as though in fear.

A short distance from the council-house, which stood at the head of the village, the runner stopped and pointed.

"There."

Shackleton went swiftly in at the narrow door below the row of leering fetish gods. A step behind him, as he had come all the way, was Bimbi.

It was several seconds before their eyes grew accustomed to the darkness. Then they saw that the circular chamber was empty. Only on a wooden bench beside the dead ashes of a fire where the headmen sat to dispense justice, lay a woman's long grey scarf.

Shackleton lifted it, puzzled.

A touch fell on his arm. "In the inner room, master."

The American had to stoop to enter the low door of the Evilis' holy of holies. Unlike the council chamber the inner room was light. A shaft of green jungle sunlight fell through the opening in the roof directly on the body of Frank Merrington, which was stretched upon the floor. He was not alone. A woman knelt at his head, holding it in her hands. At sound of Shackleton's step she lifted her face, and he looked across Merrington's still form into the eyes of Dornia Eleutherios.

Shackleton bent swiftly over the body. The face was turned away from him, the old impatient gesture persisting even in death. The breast of his tunic was open and on the flesh of the throat appeared cruel red marks.

"He is dead," the woman said, simply. "He was dead when they brought him here to me."

Shackleton rose from his knees and stood looking down at her, his face working. Deep wells of resentment rose within him.

"What is your hellish part in this?" The bitterness of his tone cut like a lash. He stooped again and loosed the dead man's clenched hand and took from it the gold clasp.

"You've been his evil genius from the first. Why couldn't you leave him alone, now, when he had everything to live for?" Shackleton said, bitterly.

Dornia Eleutherios rose, gathering her long grey draperies about her. "We cannot talk here."

She led the way to the outer room. Shackleton followed her. As they passed, Bimbi crouched beside his master's still form, laid his forehead against those restless feet now so still.

In the outer chamber, Shackleton turned again to the woman sharply.

"You sent for him. Why?"

"I sent for him because I wanted to warn him."

"To warn him of what?"

"It was when I heard that Lord Sleugh was coming." Her voice seemed suddenly very weary. All the life had been drained out of it. She sank down on the wooden bench. She took up the scarf and began trailing its colourless silken length through her fingers. It was as though she spoke not to him but to herself.

"He had seen Lord Sleugh in Douala. He told me they meant to arrest Frank for the murder of Marakoff. There was circumstantial evidence against him."

"And not against you, I suppose?" Shackleton retorted.

"It is true I took the money from Marakoff's safe." She made the admission calmly, with a little gesture of relief, as though she was glad to make it. "After all, Marakoff meant it for me. He had promised it to me, or a part of it.

And I had promised money to Frank. You know that. His own people wouldn't help. They didn't believe in him. But I believed. When he told me about the formula, something told me he was right. I saw that the one sure way was for him to go with you. I tried to make him tell me exactly where you were going. But he would not. He was loyal to you. I might not have known but for his sister. . . ."

"Joan!" Shackleton put up a hand in warning. "Take care what you say of her. . . ."

"Ah! You love her." She smiled faintly. "She has not told you of our meeting? We crossed swords there in your rooms. She told me it was the Valley. Then I knew that I must go after you. I knew that the Gorilla Brotherhood would never let you enter it. Did you think to succeed in doing easily what Marakoff was years in accomplishing?" Scorn edged her words. "I was only trying to save you from the results of your rashness. Not you. . . . Do you think I cared about you? But Frank. . . . It was all for him. I used my old power as the Goddess with the Brotherhood to get them to let you go into the Valley, knowing that if you succeeded in going into it and coming out, they would accept you as gods and make no effort to hurt you. But I failed. That man Bakai, whom you thought you owned, was too strong for me. Only Bimbi could help. Bimbi, who loved him. . . . With Bimbi, he was safe in the jungle. Only when I heard Lord Sleugh was coming, then I was afraid. I sent for Frank to warn him. Oh . . . !" She struck her clenched fist against her breast. "I know now that a miserable coward was tricking me to bring him to his death."

"Where was the trick?" Shackleton said, slowly, accusingly. "Unless your sending for him at dawn was that?"

Dawn . . . the gorilla's awakening. . . . He was killed by a gorilla along the trail."

The woman shook her head.

"He was not killed by a gorilla."

"What do you mean?"

"He was not killed by a gorilla," she repeated, steadily. "Those marks on his throat . . . are they the prints of an ape's fingers, do you think?"

Shackleton strode to the door and summoned the Bantu runner. The man came, stepping fearfully over the threshold of the council-house. At sight of the woman seated there on the headman's throne, he cringed and bowed his face in his hands. Dornia Eleutherios flung an end of her grey veil across her face.

Shackleton kept stern eyes on the runner. "Tell me again," he commanded, "before this woman, what happened this dawn on the Road of the Spirits."

"O You-Who-See-Everything, I have told you already. So suddenly it came on us, the Yellow One. . . ." He repeated without alteration or omission the story he had told Shackleton in the stockade.

Shackleton turned to the woman. "You hear?"

He made a curt gesture of dismissal, and the Bantu slunk away.

"This is your own man, Madame Eleutherios. You sent him, yourself, to bring Frank to you."

"And how much bribing do you think it would take to buy a story from a man like that?" Dornia Eleutherios returned scornfully. "I could tell you. I have bought men myself."

"I don't doubt you have. I believe your story as little as you believe his."

"Believe me or not, as you like, but I tell you, as surely as though I had been with him, those marks on his throat are the marks of a man's hands . . . the hands of the man who killed Marakoff."

For a moment Shackleton looked at her, startled. Then a cynical smile twisted the corners of his mouth.

"I can well understand your building up any story that will protect yourself," he said. "But what about this?" He opened his hand and held out the gold clasp. "You sent this to Frank. It was on your cloak that night we dined at Claridge's. You don't deny that you were at Marakoff's that night?"

She met the accusation squarely. "Yes, I was there. Frank took me there. I had my own key and I let myself in."

She made a little gesture of weariness and stood up. She flung the veil away from her face and stood regarding him. "Let me tell you still more. I never cared who killed Marakoff. Perhaps I was glad to see him killed. There was in our relationship little to make me love him. But now I care deeply because I am sure that the man who killed Marakoff has killed all that is precious in my life. That man is your brother."

She had always seemed to him strange, now she seemed to him definitely evil; a woman who would drag into her toils any one known or unknown to her if it suited her purposes. She had once asked him about his brother. She knew that his brother had been a pupil of Marakoff's, that Marakoff had favoured him. Out of these bits, if the need came,

and if Lord Sleugh pressed matters, God knows what story she would weave to protect herself.

There came at that moment from the river the sound of pipes . . . the little five-note melody of approach.

"Listen!"

The Goddess went to the hut door. Two long canoes rounded the bend. From the lane of houses leading to the river the villagers came running. She spoke across her shoulder to Shackleton.

"That is Lord Sleugh who is coming." Her eyes sought out the low door leading to the inner room; then with her old proud gesture of the Goddess she flung the veil once more across her face.

"He shall not find me here."

She stepped across the threshold, then turning to him for the last time:

"If you love that boy's sister, go to her, and go quickly."



Chapter Thirty

THE YELLOW APE

JOAN MERRINGTON followed Kolak's careful footsteps. As she went there was uppermost in her mind the thought of James Shackleton's hopeless love for her.

When she came to Marakoff's hut and found James Shackleton, she would say to him: "Forgive me. I came to you because I need you. I dared not stay at the stockade, because Schnitter wanted to get the formula from me. I had to trick him to get away. It is like a fate, my coming to you. I could not help it." She would say: "Do not let my being here hurt you. But if it does, then forgive me even that, too."

Kolak stopped and raised his head, scenting the air like a foxhound. He stooped and looked carefully at the ground, at some sign here or there, then with a sweep of his arm he held aside a cascade of great fern fronds and motioned her to go past them along a nearly indistinguishable path.

The green cascade swung knowingly into place again, back of them.

He stepped ahead of her, and took the lead once more.

All about them the spicy, acrid odour rose from the floor of the jungle. About them was a privacy, a secrecy of quiet light. On all sides of them the uprisen giant tree trunks watched without a word. Everywhere silence like a sea, and dragging through this from time to time the strange cries of birds, as a small stick is dragged through water that

closes about it again immediately. Sometimes there was the beat of drums, the sound deadened and flattened by the distance; once there was the sound of a single drum more resonant, in the direction of their going.

Joan Merrington had had some difficulty in persuading Kolak to come with her. Had not Bartu and the rest gone seeking the Yellow One . . . the new dawn-bringer? Had not his master left him there to guard her, The-Woman-Who-Came?

And when she had persuaded him that if his master were there, his master would wish him to do as she bade him, there was still another difficulty . . . Marakoff's hut.

Kolak shook his head. Who would go to that evil spot! Even his master, if he were here, would not command him to do that.

But she won that point, too, by conceding that Kolak need not go near the hut. He might build his fire against the night at a distance from it. There he might stay and watch for the new dawn-bringer, until she came to him again.

"Are we nearly there, Kolak?" she said, after a long time.

"Truly. A little longer. Soon."

A parrot flew, like a flame, waveringly ahead of them, and disappeared with a cry into the dense greenery. Overhead, other birds answered.

Once Kolak took a quick, jumping step backward with his hand stretched to stop Joan's coming. A green snake, like a spotted living branch, drew miraculously across the path and melted away. The single note of a little drum, such as a native beats when he is travelling, came through the air in deep rhythmic bounds, followed by a wavering chant.

"He goes.
He returns.
This is the road.
Little burden.
Big burden.
This is the road."

Kolak's teeth shone. He put up his head listening, and chanted an answer:

"He goes.
He returns.
This is the road."

Again a brushing aside of ferns, and they were once more on the Road of the Spirits. They had left it at one point, made a secret short cut, and rejoined it.

A native with a drum was coming toward them, beating the drum rhythmically.

Tied to his drum was a letter. He stopped to ask Kolak how much farther he must go to find the "city" of He-Who-Sees-Everything.

Joan could not understand his words, but Kolak interpreted for her. This letter tied to the drum was for her. He gave it up at last.

Joan opened it, and read:

"I promised to see you again. Will you come to me,
as soon as you can?

If I am not at the hut, wait for me."

She experienced a moment of mingled relief and dread. No, of relief only. If James Shackleton still had the mad idea of sacrificing himself, at least he was expecting her, and once with him, she could dissuade him. Perhaps she

would say to him, "If you love me, then you will prove it by not talking any more of this thing."

They parted with the messenger, he going his way, they theirs. *

Not long after this Kolak stopped and, turning away his head, pointed an arm.

"There. Truly."

Joan looked. Framed in a lighted vista was a clearing where once a small village had stood. Here and there, a tilted roof, fallen or decayed, was nearly submerged in the deep grass. At the far end of the clearing, with plastered mud walls and an enormously heavy thatch, stood Marakoff's hut.

Kolak's eyes begged her not to go.

Joan smiled at him. "If I needed to," she said, "I could come and call to you, and say, 'Kolak, I have come to sit by your fire.'"

He would not watch her go. Once she turned to look back and smile at him. But his head was still turned away.

At the Savoy . . . how long ago that was! . . . Ned Shackleton had drawn a little map, and he and she had bent over it. He had made a small cross and had said, "And here is Marakoff's hut." Where had she gone, that inexperienced, care-free girl of the Savoy, who had never had her happiness menaced? What had become of her?

Marakoff's hut!

She went on toward it, her heart swinging.

It was as though the heavy-walled, low-browed hut were watching her with a secret and quiet malevolence as she approached it.

She was near enough at last to see the thickness of the

walls as they showed in the open doorway. Near enough to see the strong square pattern of the bars at the one deep window.

Marakoff's hut!

Within about ten yards of it, she stopped and called, "James!"

A long pause.

"James Shackleton!"

No answer.

He was not there yet. She must wait for his return. That was what he had said. Besides, he could not possibly have supposed she would be there so soon.

She went a few steps nearer. Still the low-browed, solidly built hut kept its attention fixed on her.

"What are you doing here? Where do you come from? Why do you call James Shackleton? Who is this white-faced girl, slim as a reed? Who is this ghost without fibre or reality? Who are such people as these? They die and melt away and no one knows of them again, like the slender antelopes of the jungle, whose lives are doomed from the first. Who is the white-faced girl, and the white-faced man she calls?"

The mud hut, squatted on the grass like a mud basilisk, seemed almost blinkingly to say these things: "Why are you calling James Shackleton? He is not here. The people who do not die live here. The people who live here are Marakoff and Dornia Eleutherios."

(Who had said that to her, that men like Marakoff do not die? Was it Schnitter?)

She put these hateful thoughts from her, and went on. Marakoff was dead and powerless, only a *loup-garou*, and a

foolish and terrible dread in her mind. As a child, she had had a dread of giant footsteps approaching her or following her . . . footsteps that never were, of giants that never were. The only giants were the trees back there in the jungle. She chided herself: "Childish of you! Childish of you, Joan Merrington!"

When she came to the doorway she paused.

Through the door and the barred window the late red afternoon light fell blood red on the dirt floor. A little of it fell on the couch of boughs, on the blanket on the couch, on the table and bench made of boughs, bound tightly with lianas. The night would soon fall, and quickly.

She stepped inside, as one steps from a ledge into deep water.

She was glad it was over. Now she would not be such a child. She would be the capable, unemotional person experience had made her.

But immediately a chill sense of dread came over her as her eye fell on the door, swung back on its hinges, flat against the wall. It was made of thick iron bars crossed and flattened to form a heavy lattice. On the outside, the side turned now toward her, a lock and a massive bolt and a chain. Her glance went to the doorway. Yes. Sunk deep in one side of it was a heavy staple. Again the thought of Marakoff and Dornia Eleutherios swept across her like a shadow.

Outside, the jungle had darkened. The light was fading even from the clearing; fading and darkening steadily but surely, like the flame of a lamp that has drawn up its last drop of oil and sinks rapidly.

How long would it be before James Shackleton came?

She seated herself on the couch.

She remembered little snatches of verse from her childhood and tried to piece them out, to keep her thoughts from wandering into ugly and shadowy places:

"There was a crooked man
And he walked a crooked mile.
He found a crooked sixpence
Upon a crooked stile. . . ."

What came after that?

Marakoff's hut! To think of her being alone in Marakoff's hut after nightfall!

"The lark from its light wing
The dewdrop is shaking.
Oh, Kathleen Mavourneen. . . ."

No! Not that! That was the song she was singing that night in the music room at Cranbrook, that horrible rainy, windy night just after the murder of Marakoff, when Frank had come back, dripping and swaying and not himself, and had told her he was going to Africa.

Across the clearing, very far it seemed to her now, she saw the glimmer of Kolak's fire, fluttering and fading, like feeble heat lightning, against those towering shadows of jungle depth. She thought of calling to him, but did not dare, lest, in his fear of Marakoff's hut, he might turn and leave her altogether.

She thought of going to him, but dared not trust herself to the deepening darkness and the loneliness of the clearing.

There was a slight crashing, as of an animal going cautiously, furtively, through the underbrush beyond the hut, that brought her to her feet with a start. She took a swift two steps, seized the iron door, and swung it to.

That would keep her safe, at least, from wild beasts.

She reached a white hand, like a flower that trembles, outside the bars, raised the heavy latch bar, and let it fall into its socket.

Far off she could hear the jungle drums beating at different far distances and varied intervals.

The night had fallen now, secret and warm, like a cloak dropped to cover and hide some terror. Yet the darkness was more of the jungle round about than of the night itself.

Then, suddenly, something indefinable seemed to be coming. It was as though footsteps approached, but without sound. It was as though some one were advancing steadily nearer, bearing a light, shielded by a hand, as Toppins had borne the light that night long ago at Cranbrook.

Then suddenly the mysterious shielding hand was taken away. The light was raised slowly, yet swiftly, startlingly. The moon was raised and held above the jungle trees. Its light flooded the clearing, flooded Marakoff's hut, and fell like a revelation on its floor in barred whiteness.

The moonlight was clear and bell-like and silent and lonely—a loneliness intensified by the far-away dance drums of the jungle, which were beginning to waken. In village after village far away the drummers stood, their faces strained to the moon, beating upon the drums, or stroking the taut skins of the drum-heads soundingly, coaxingly, with the hard palm of the hand, calling the people to the dances, the languorous, slow, sinuous dances of the white moonlight. Full moon, and a full throbbing overburdened pulse in the jungle. Strung upon the white strings of roads like black beads were the native villages, and in them there would be women dancing with slow, winding, shuffling steps,

hardly steps at all, movements only; arms held low, wrists bent, and palms out; the amorous, alluring, suggestive movements of the dance of full moonlight nights. All this lent an indescribable aloofness and loneliness to the hut, and to the solitary fitful glimmer of Kolak's fire.

The bright-lit clearing in front of the hut was hung about now by shadows deepened to double their depth by the diffused flooding brightness of the moon.

Joan strained her eyes toward these shadows, passionately hoping for some movement that would tell that James Shackleton was returning.

Then suddenly, an almost sick relief swept over her.

Something was moving in the shadow, a moving form, hardly yet a form, that paused and came nearer; paused again and approached. Why did he pause? Was it to listen? Was it to guess whether she was there? She wanted to cry out, but did not dare. She would wait. 'Oh, the relief! In a moment he would be there. He would take her in his arms. Never mind! Only a moment more, and all her dread would go, utterly, sweepingly, as the earth turns, sweepingly, largely toward daylight.

The figure swung now into the full moonlight.

Her fingers tightened in terror on the bars.

Not James Shackleton.

Some creature, rather manlike but not a man, with a strange, staggering and pausing and lurching step.

As it came nearer she could see, in the white light, the great massive head. Head of an ape. Arms of an ape. Body of an ape. Strange, hurried, intent, forward motion of an ape, and that terrible human way that apes have . . . Ned

Shackleton had told her that! . . . of looking over their shoulders as though fearful some one were following.

She could see in the vividness of the moonlight that this creature was not dark like the ape skins Kolak and Bartu had hung in the stockade. It was light, with a strange and terrible lightness. The Yellow Ape!

She ought to have been glad. Here was the end of Ned Shackleton's quest. But no, not yet. She could not be glad. The strangeness, the terrible humanness of the creature, overpowered and fascinated her. Would it come close to the hut? Once it dropped in the grass. Was it approaching on all-fours? The next moment it was on its feet again and was coming toward her, as though it knew she was there.

Ned Shackleton had told her of the terrible power of them. Would the door hold, if by some diabolical wisdom the Yellow Ape did know she was there? And was it a savage creature only? How manlike was it? What powers of thought, what craft did it have?

She withdrew to a corner of the hut, sick with horror.

A moment later there was first a black shadow, then a heavy crash against the door.

This was followed by a pause more terrible even than the crash. Then, another crash, and a human shaking of the bars, as a man angered might shake them, with violent purpose.

Would the door hold?

More rattling of the bars, then a third crash.

The door swung violently open. The shaggy body fell heavily, and lay where it fell.

For a long time Joan Merrington stood leaning against the wall, unable to move.

There was dead stillness.

The moonlight poured over the yellow body blocking the doorway.

Would it stir?

Would it rise and sway and stumble toward her?

Why had it fallen like that? Had Ned Shackleton's men encountered it and wounded it? Was it drugged?

It might have been years later that she determined to go nearer. If it was drugged or asleep, she might perhaps manage to creep past it and escape from the hut.

With an agony of caution she held her breath, and took a step nearer. It did not stir. Another step. If only she could close her eyes and steal past it.

No! There was only one thing to do. She must steal close enough to look and see if there were some spot where she could put her foot and get stealthily past.

She crept nearer, cautious, cautious, like a shadow in a dream.

No sound or stir.

Nearer.

She stooped to look.

No, there was no spot where she could step, no way of escaping without touching it, wakening it.

Then as she stooped looking, she sprang up straight as an arrow, drew back a step, pressed her clenched hand against her mouth, and turned to stone.

It stirred.

It uttered a moan. Like a man who shifts his position when waking, it turned slightly and flung out one arm.

As it did this a terrible thing happened. The massive hand and yellow forearm skin of the gorilla fell back, with a

slight thud like a glove that falls, or a sheath that splits open, and there was disclosed that which it had covered—something white, incredibly white in the moonlight; not the arm and hand of a gorilla, but a human forearm, a human hand . . . the long, thin, slender hand of James Shackleton.



Chapter Thirty-one

IN MARAKOFF'S HUT

JOAN, horrified and fascinated, watched James Shackleton.

With fingers that trembled he loosed the ape skin at his throat, and put back from his face the face of the gorilla. The weight of the gigantic head of the creature carried the whole tawny skin to the floor. It lay there crumpled, a thing of sinister power and malevolence.

In the moonlight streaming in on Shackleton, white almost as daylight, she could see the sunken lines and hollows in his ashy face, and the madness shining in his eyes.

There was a note almost of monotony and chanting in his voice.

"It is strange!" he said, swaying a little. "Strange! You and I there together in London that night, when I watched you sleep; you and I in the stockade when I had your lips; and now you and I here"—he cast his glance around him a minute, and lowered his tone almost to a whisper—"in this hut . . . *Marakoff's* hut."

She did not reply . . . dared not. Only kept her eyes fixed steadily upon him.

Something in the tenseness and tragedy of his face softened a moment, as though a shadow of gentleness had passed over it.

"It might have been very different," he said at last. "It might have been you and I for always. . . ." The hardness

returned, and bitterness drew his lips back. "You and I for always . . . but for my brother!"

He looked at her a moment searchingly.

"You look at me strangely," he said. "Don't look at me that way, my dear." There was a little note of warning in his voice. His brows came together. "You look as though you had never known me, never seen me."

"I have not! I have not!" her heart wanted to say, wildly. But her lips said nothing, only quivered slightly.

"There's no need to be afraid of me,"¹ he said. "I'm not wearing that now." He glanced at the skin on the floor. "It was very useful. Disguised as a beast it was easy, you see, to spring out on him on the road. Don't stand. You will tire yourself out. Sit down."

She slipped down quiveringly on the bench, and let her head sink back a little, to rest against the wall.

"That's right," he said. "That's much better. Rest."

He went to the couch and took the blanket from it. Her eyes were closed. As he brought the blanket, something else dragged from underneath it, shimmering. But he did not see it. His gaze was deeply intent on the pallor of her face. The moon shone on it, like moonlight on ivory.

As he approached her she opened her eyes a little, and closed them again. As he stood close, her muscles became taut like steel. If only, by the mercy of God, he would not touch her!

He did not. He held the blanket by its edge, carefully; lowered it, and dropped it with the greatest concern and gentleness across her knees. As he did this his fingers released at the same time something of which they had been until then unaware . . . a glittering gold fabric which

slipped in three separate sliding movements from under the blanket to the ground, and then lay perfectly still, like a gold snake.

He stooped and raised the snake, and it became, instead, a gold cloak with a fur collar. He seemed to recall something. "I put it on my brother's bed, and I sent the Greek woman the clasp as I promised her I would." Then he dropped the cloak carefully over Joan's knees, watching her face intently.

"Gold and ivory," he said, as though not to her but to himself. "Ivory and gold. That's Africa."

"Didn't you miss the cloak?" he said, after a pause, "nor the notes? Or wouldn't you tell me?" He glanced mistrustfully at her, and then over his shoulder. "There are the notes, on the couch. I found them in the thatch in your hut, where you said they were. I took them that day, after you left me. The day your brother came back." He paused, and again the bitter look drew back his lips. "After your brother came back . . . from the Valley. Do you know"—he paused again, and again his brows came together—"there was something very terrible about being in your hut that day. I don't suppose you knew. Being so near you, I mean, and only for such a little while. Now it is different! You are here, and I am here; and it's a gorgeous night. . . . Look at that moon! And there is no one to take you from me. But there is a great deal that we shall have to talk about first; a great deal that I shall have to tell you. . . ."

He walked away from her, as far as the door, and stood looking up at the moon.

Her reason flooded over her horror now. What could be done? She leaned forward and touched the cloak so that it

fell on the floor again. Madness, she knew, was a thing that must not be crossed. She must go about everything gently, craftily, wisely. By sheer cleverness of mind she must persuade him. If she could get him to go with her across the clearing in the moonlight. . . . If she could get to Kolak. . . . In that way something might be done. She could get Kolak to go for some of the natives . . . for Schnitter, even. Better Schnitter even than this. No, not Schnitter. Perhaps she could persuade Shackleton to go with her to the stockade. She would tell him that Ned was not there. He would be even a protection to her there. Something could be done.

She rose. But before she had taken a step he had turned. He came back to her.

"It's no use, my dear," he said. "You may as well sit down. I won't let you go. First of all, Kolak isn't there. That served me very well, you see." He glanced at the ape skin on the floor. "Christianity doesn't change these natives so very much. If it had been the other kind of dawn-bringer . . . the old kind . . . but a man alone by his fire, and then the yellow ape looking at him right through the smoke of his fire. Kolak's gone. His fire isn't burning any longer. I just looked."

She sat down again.

"Besides, I want to tell you." He paused in front of her. "You see, there is a reason for everything. There is nothing more certain in the world. It's a thing you should never forget. It's very easy to go mad if you forget it. And that makes trouble! Now, what was I saying?" He seemed to lose the thread of his thought, drew his hand across his forehead, and recovered it. "My brother . . . always my

brother. That was it! Everything was always easier for him than for me. That was the beginning. Whatever I could do, he could do better. I always wanted what was his. He never wanted what was mine. I used to think, 'I'm nothing but a man Friday . . . that's all I am.' But I wouldn't tell him. But you are different. You are mine and you'll understand. Marakoff always liked me best; made a point of it. I used to think, 'Some day he'll single me out.' Then he did one day. There was a scientific meeting. But he didn't really want me—he wanted my brother. He said, 'Will you ask your brother to come to see me?' " He stopped. "Why don't you say something to me?"

She dropped her hands in her lap and looked up into his haunted eyes. "What shall I say to you?"

He looked to make sure she was not tricking him. "Nothing. Nothing. Only there's a good deal more to tell you. . . ." With little proddings of one foot, he moved the ape skin farther away. "Dornia Eleutherios was there the night Marakoff was killed. She let herself in with her latch-key. Your brother was waiting for her in his car outside in Smith Square. She wanted Marakoff's money, and she took it. The safe was open, and Marakoff lying there dead. She said Marakoff had promised to give it to her that night. Perhaps he had. But I saw what was to be done. I was very wise that night. I told her that unless she did what I told her to do, she should not have the money and I would drag her into the whole ugly affair. That was how I got the ape. The beast knew her. I made her put her cloak about it."

Joan covered her eyes and shuddered.

"You see, Marakoff had seen my brother, had talked with him, favoured him. How did I know? I thought it was the

very kind of ape my brother was looking for. So it needed to be destroyed. You see? The Masters fortune . . . everything! It wasn't hard. Everything was easy at my room in the Museum. But I was too much of a scientist to destroy that." He touched the skin again with his foot. "And now everything is turning out right!"

"Please, you're tired," she begged, quiveringly. "Don't let's talk any more."

"What was hard," he went on, without noticing her, "was to have all that knowledge of it to myself afterward . . . there in my rooms that night, especially, while you slept, I sat and watched you. That was hard."

She rose and laid her hand on his arm. "Come, you're tired. Lie down on the couch, and I'll just put this blanket over you and you can sleep."

"I'm not tired," he said, but went with her. "When I say, 'Come,' they shall come! When I say, 'Go,' they shall go! Beasts in the jungle!" He put his head back and laughed. "I got you here, and with that skin I shall lure my brother here. After that, everything is simple. I didn't think of any of that at the Museum that night. But you see how everything works out. Your brother gone; my brother gone; only you and I and the formula. All that wealth! Everything! It will no longer be 'But for my brother!' I've been through a great deal. Most people haven't any souls. Just hollow shells. Then you came. There's such a thing as walking with naked feet through hell. What was it you said you wanted of me?"

She grasped at the chance. "I wanted you to lie down," she said, "and I'll sit by you, and you'll sleep."

"Will you sing to me? Your brother said you sang. Not my brother . . ." he frowned . . . "your brother. . . ."

His head fell back, his face white and gaunt, and his eyes closed. "Why don't you sing?"

"What shall I sing?"

"There was a song we sang when we were boys about three crows that sat in a row on a tree. Do you know that one?"

"Yes. We used to sing it, too, when we were children."

"That's nice."

He lay staring up at the thatch.

She began singing softly as though she were singing to a child:

"Three crows sat in a row on a tree,
Black as the blackest of crows should be,
The sun shone blue on the coats of all three.
Hey, nay, and derry down,
One was a peddler,
One was a meddler,
And one was a king with a crown."

He turned his face toward her, and prompted her.

"One said, 'Brother, what shall we eat . . .?'"

She nodded and continued to sing, and he closed his eyes.

"One said, 'Brother, what shall we eat?'
The peddler said, 'Corn'; the meddler said, 'Wheat.'
But the king said, 'Three ripe cherries would be sweet.'
Hey, nay, and derry down,
One was a peddler,
One was a meddler,
And one was a king with a crown."

She did not know how often she sang it over. By and by he lay with his eyes closed. She stopped singing. He opened them again.

"Don't stop," he said. A little frown came and stayed

between his brows. He held out his hand, "Give me your hand."

She put her hand in his, not daring not to, and his fingers closed tightly over it.

"Now sing it again. What I like is the sun shining blue. Just the way it does shine on a crow. . . . And the three cherries. . . ."

It seemed a long time before she could feel his fingers relax slightly. She stopped singing, ready to begin again. His eyes did not open.

She waited for him to sleep still more profoundly.

With infinite care she freed her hand, singing very softly all the while.

She rose, and stood watching him.

He turned restlessly. She drifted down beside him again as softly as a leaf drifts, and waited. When she at last reached the door she stood in the shadow, her face turned toward him. Would he wake?

Even in the clearing she had to go slowly and carefully, with many pauses, lest some sound of her going reach him.

She went in the direction of Kolak's fire. He had said it was no longer burning, but perhaps Kolak might not have gone far. Perhaps she could find him. Perhaps he had only gone to the Road of the Spirits. She thought she could find the path. The white moonlight showed it to her.

When she came near to where she believed the trail led soon into the larger path, she heard a sound that might have been some creature pushing its careful way through the jungle.

She steadied herself in horror against a giant tree trunk, her clenched hand tight against her lips, waiting.

There was a slight crash and the undergrowth parted. Then a shout of native voices, and in the midst of it Ned Shackleton's voice:

"Joan! Are you safe?"

Joan had only strength to say: "The hut! Your brother!"

One of the men ran to a pool near-by and brought water in a leaf.

When Shackleton at last got to the hut it was empty, save for the yellow ape skin on the floor.



Chapter Thirty-two

THE RETURN

INSTEAD of being overcome by the new shock of Frank Merrington's death, Joan, coming from the horrors of her experience in Marakoff's hut, seemed to carry with her a secret quietness and strength, as those often do to whom has been accorded more than the usual revelations of the depths of dread and terror and pity of life.

Lord Sleugh, who was now at the stockade, and who had always, in a way pleasantly flattering to himself, looked upon Joan as a lovable, if sometimes wilful, child, much in need of his guidance and protection, found himself suddenly amazed and touched by this white Joan, so worn yet so quiet and so steady who arranged with such tenderness the purple and white kwari blossoms in the pavilion where the body of her brother lay.

He was confronted, too, with a wholly new evaluation of Ned Shackleton, since his conversation with him in the village of the Evilis. There had been shown him one of those revelations of youth, and of youth's strength and magnificent possibilities, which unconsciously on the part of youth itself are sometimes flashed disturbingly, yet reassuringly, on those older, senior minds whose habit it has long been to rule by right of precedence and their own powers.

Leaving Joan to return to the stockade under the care of Lord Sleugh, Ned Shackleton, taking the best of his men

with him, continued to search the forest all that moonlight night for any trace of James Shackleton.

When the quick night came over the stockade Lord Sleugh insisted that Joan leave the pavilion and go to her own hut to rest, leaving Bimbi and several of the most trusted natives to keep guard.

Shortly after dawn there was a soft knock at the door of her hut, then Bimbi's voice,

"Little Spear! Open the door."

He came in. Tall and erect, more than ever "Son-of-a-Chief," the usual dignity of his face was accented now by its gauntness.

He bent down for a moment to her very feet, laying his head for an instant upon them.

Joan drew back, puzzled, unused to that mood in him, remembering rather the haughty, self-contained Bimbi, and the Bimbi of her childhood days who gave his commands so commandingly.

He rose to his full height again.

"He is yours," he said. "Tell me"—he paused and leaned a little toward her, with his hands out and raised, as though immeasurable things hung on her answer, "is he mine, also?"

Joan's eyes brimmed and the tears ran down her cheeks.

"Yes, Bimbi, yours. Yours almost more than mine."

A light of great relief came across Bimbi's face.

"Truly, then, I have done what is right."

"What have you done, Bimbi? Yes, you've always done what was right for him."

"Before the dawn I went. I made the place. On the ledge where he stood, where he said he wanted to lie. . . ." He

looked away. "You know what he said. I will take him there. The place is ready. He and I will go there again."

"How can you, Bimbi, alone?"

"I will not go alone," he said. "I will take with me four of the men who came with Lord Sleugh . . . Father Hilary's men from the mission. You will tell them they are to obey me; that they are to do everything I say. The rest you will trust to me, Little Spear. This will be right, too."

Joan considered. "But, Bimbi, it isn't quite right. I don't believe I can. It's not right to let anyone else go into the Valley, yet."

"But you are to tell them," insisted Bimbi, "that they are to obey me."

He took from his loin cloth a piece of blue grass cloth that he had tucked into it and which Joan had not before noticed. "When we get to the place that leads in, the place that they should not see . . ." He raised the cloth and with two quick gestures had it tied about his eyes. "Look," he said, feeling the air testingly with one hand and grasping an imaginary something with the other, "only the blind shall go with him. Only I shall see. Truly. You heard what he said. Is it best?"

She thought a moment. "Yes, Bimbi, it is best."

He turned without a word to leave her.

"Bimbi!"

He swung around again and waited, his hand on the door.

"Bimbi! You'll come back! I need you! I couldn't get on without you!"

He came and stood by her.

"Little Spear! Little Spear! Why will you talk like a

child? Is the world a safe place, that I should go away and leave you in it? I will come back."

A little later the stockade call-drum was beating the *ndan*, the jungle name of Frank Merrington, "He-Who-Laughes," then the five throbbing notes of the call to mourning, which, of all the primal calls of the jungle, falls most direct on the heart.

"*Ba, ba, mo toé!*" (His hands are laid together!)

Far through the jungle other drums would take it up.

"*Ba, ba, mo toé!*"

Joan gave no command for the stilling of the drums in the stockade. What had often been to her dread of the African drums, of the African voice of the jungle, melted now into tears and a kind of relief and gratitude. It seemed that the jungle itself, like a great and deep heart that understood, was throbbing with her own sorrow.

"*Ba, ba, mo toé!*" (His hands are laid together!)

So at intervals the call continued, as though the day itself were a folding away, as of something never to be unfolded again.

In his hut that night, Lord Sleugh was dictating to one of his secretaries his final report on the Marakoff murder case, that the report might be sent by runner in the early morning to Yoko in time to catch the little river paddle-steamer leaving for Douala the following day, and from there to Sir Esme Wilton in England.

It was, in Lord Sleugh's judgment, imperative that every suspicion be cleared away and the entire matter disposed of at the earliest possible moment.

His interview in Yoko with Mary Langdon, and his inter-

view with Edward Shackleton at the village of the Evilis, had cleared every point.

Mary Langdon had been at Marakoff's house in Smith Square on the night of the murder. She knew Marakoff well. She had studied psychology under him for several years. During one of these years she had met in Marakoff's classes both James and Edward Shackleton. In the summer preceding the murder she had written some articles for an American newspaper syndicate about Marakoff, exposing the ruthlessness of his psychological experiments and investigations into human motives, into human lives and human behaviours.

Not because Marakoff feared her, but because he feared lest her articles, if seen by some of those on whose lives he was experimenting, might tend to spoil his experiments, Marakoff determined, if possible, to buy her off, for a large sum. With this in view, he asked her to come to see him at half past ten o'clock on the evening of November 25th.

Mary Langdon kept the appointment, listened to Marakoff's offer, and scorned it. This angered Marakoff and he threatened her. It was she who said at this point, "If you touch me, I will kill you."

While he and Mary Langdon were still talking, the bell rang. Marakoff asked her to wait in the adjoining room. She stepped into it. He closed the door, and then went himself to answer the bell.

Mary Langdon could not hear the entire conversation between Marakoff and his visitor, but she gathered that the visitor was angered by some injustice which he believed had been done him.

At one point in the interview she heard Marakoff come

toward the door of the room in which she was, and heard him turn the key softly in the lock.

At the time she did not know what reason to assign to this. Later she believed Marakoff locked the door so that she could not enter the room and join forces with his visitor.

In giving her testimony to Lord Sleugh, Mary Langdon had asserted, that having for a while worked quite closely with Marakoff, she believed she knew his methods well. A shrewd woman and a trained psychologist, she suspected what others would probably not have had the grim imagination to guess, namely that Marakoff, in the name of science, never scrupled to make use of human beings to prove his theories. She believed he subtly incited them to emotions, sometimes sinister and terrible, only that he might watch the growth and the course of these emotions and study them. It was her belief that Marakoff had deliberately over a long period—for the two Shackletons had studied with him some time previous to the Marakoff murder—roused the jealousy of James Shackleton not only so that he might watch the growth of that emotion, but so that he might ascertain exactly to what acts it might drive him. Mary Langdon even believed that Marakoff kept a detailed record of these experiments which he called his “cases.” While at the time it had not occurred to her, yet later she had come to believe that James Shackleton was one of these “cases,” one of Marakoff’s experiments in psychology and in hidden human motives and behaviours; in short one of Marakoff’s victims.

If this were so—and Lord Sleugh saw no reason to doubt it—then who could say how many other human

tragedies, and possibly murders, might be laid at Marakoff's door.

Resentful that Marakoff should have locked the door, Mary Langdon stepped to one of the French windows in the room, where she was, which opened on a balcony overlooking the garden, and tried it. It was not locked. She opened it and stepped onto the balcony.

From the balcony she could see plainly Marakoff's study. One of the windows of the study was even open slightly, so that she could both see and hear what occurred.

She recognized in Marakoff's visitor Marakoff's former pupil, James Shackleton. Marakoff's face was dark, but Shackleton's was livid.

She heard Shackleton say with the very extreme of bitterness:

"So you've trusted your work to my brother, then! Then you've tricked me all this while. Everything was a lie. You did not care for me most, then, as you pretended. You always cared more for him and his work than for me and mine. Perhaps you would never have favoured me at all, but for my brother!"

Marakoff's reply to this was slow and cutting: "What sort of an inferior fool would I have been to favour you for any other reason."

And all the while he watched James Shackleton closely through half-closed eyes, as though he wished to observe the exact effect of these words on his victim.

The rest happened all in an instant. Shackleton took up a little black ebony figure that stood on the table, and struck the fatal blow.

Only a moment later, while Shackleton stood swaying,

dazed and aghast at what he had done, the door into the study from the hall opened and the beautiful Greek woman, wearing a gold cloak, entered.

The Greek woman seemed more shocked than horrified by what she saw.

James Shackleton said, sharply, "What are you here for?"

She told him she was there to get money which Marakoff had promised to give her that night. She was sure it would be in the safe. But was the safe unlocked?

James Shackleton turned to it.

Mary Langdon knew it was unlocked; Marakoff had opened it when he had made the offer to buy her off.

James Shackleton opened it now, and brought a handful of bank notes and leaned to the light, examining them. "How much did he promise you?" he said.

"Five thousand pounds," the Greek woman answered.

He leaned toward her a little. "Here are ten one-thousand-pound notes. You may have them all if you will do as I ask."

"What do you want me to do?" the Greek woman questioned.

Then James Shackleton drove his bargain with her. He would give her the money if she would say nothing of what she had seen and if she would secure for him Marakoff's ape.

Shackleton knew, it was more or less common knowledge, not only that the Greek woman had perfect control of the creature, but that Marakoff had taught her, and sometimes exacted of her, to give it a hypodermic to make it more tractable. As a matter of fact (the housekeeper testified to this later), Marakoff had already given the ape a hypodermic earlier in the evening when the beast was restless.

Here the eye-witness testimony of Mary Langdon ended. Not wishing to witness more of what occurred, she left the balcony, went through the garden to the rear street on which it gave, walked a few blocks, hailed a taxi, and went to her hotel.

The rest of the occurrence of that night Mary Langdon had learned from the Greek woman herself, in her interview with her in Africa.

The Greek woman had guided the ape in its half-stupefied condition to the lower story and to Marakoff's study, where it willingly enough went with her.

James Shackleton, warning her once more that she was to say nothing of what she had seen, unless she, herself, wished to be dragged into the case, bade her give him her scarf and cloak. These were then wrapped about the ape.

Then he commanded her to lead it to the front door, and wait with it while he brought a taxi. He returned very soon and himself guided the disguised creature from the steps and across the pavement and into the taxi. The Greek woman saw them drive away. When they were out of sight she left Marakoff's house and hurried to join her escort, who was waiting in his auto just outside Smith Square.

She told him nothing of what had happened. He asked her what had become of her cloak. She merely said she did not wish to go back for it, and asked him to drive her home, that she might get another. Then to disarm suspicion she suggested that they go to the Topaz Cat.

"All these things," dictated Lord Sleugh, "tally perfectly with the facts concerning James Shackleton; with his work at the Museum, where he had a private laboratory of his own, and every facility for the dissecting and mounting of

wild animals; they tally with his possession of the yellow ape skin. (This piece of evidence I shall bring with me when I return to England.) The facts as outlined tally, too, with his long-standing jealousy of his brother, and his later madness. This madness led him to wear the yellow ape-skin, and in this horrible disguise as a beast, to spring out of the jungle growth and kill my beloved ward Frank Merrington.

"All of this clears Edward Shackleton of any possible suspicion. There is no question but what Marakoff held Edward Shackleton and his abilities in the highest regard. Substantiating this, I have before me by the courtesy of Mr. Shackleton, the following note, which Marakoff wrote that night and gave to him:

'I herewith give Edward Shackleton the notes of my forthcoming book. It is my wish, in the event of my death, that he carry on my work.

'SERGIUS MARAKOFF.'

"This, so far as I can see," Lord Sleugh concluded, "completely and perfectly clears everything."

He rose now, gathered his papers together, placed them in the hands of his secretary, and dismissed him.

A few minutes later he seated himself again and wrote the following personal letter to Sir Esme Wilton:

"MY DEAR SIR ESME:

"I have just sent you my official report on the Marakoff murder case. I wish to send you further an unofficial explanation of the question that puzzled us both so much—the question of the hour of Edward Shackleton's appointment with Marakoff on the night of Marakoff's murder. Since this

question involves slightly a lady (you know, of course, to whom I refer) whose name we both wish to keep out of the official report, I am sending you the information in this personal form.

"It is now established that Edward Shackleton was not at Marakoff's house at 11 at the time of the murder but at 8:30. Marakoff, it seems, asked James Shackleton to ask his brother to go to the house in Smith Square at 8:30; but James Shackleton told his brother that Marakoff would see him at 11. This was so that James Shackleton himself could go to see Marakoff at 8:30, forestalling his brother, hoping to get for himself from Marakoff whatever favour Marakoff might be planning to give Edward Shackleton.

"Edward Shackleton would have gone at 11, as you and I believed he did, but for another set of circumstances which caused James Shackleton's plan to miscarry.

"My ward, Frank Merrington, did not know Marakoff wished to see Edward Shackleton, but he believed that if Edward Shackleton could see Marakoff, Marakoff might be induced to finance Shackleton's African expedition. My ward knew a lady who was well known to Marakoff (again you know, of course, to whom I refer). He begged her to telephone, asking Marakoff to give Shackleton an appointment.

"Marakoff's answer to her was that he was expecting Edward Shackleton at 8:30. This she reported to Shackleton, which Shackleton accepted,

assuming at the moment merely that his brother had made a mistake.

"When I questioned him, Mr. Shackleton admitted frankly the long standing of his brother's jealousy of him, but said he had not in the least suspected the lengths to which this practically pathological jealousy would drive him.

"I feel that it clears matters even further to know that Edward Shackleton, like yourself, believed my ward to be, though not actually guilty, yet somehow involved in the Marakoff case, and did his best to protect him.

"Of Edward Shackleton I can only say that he is utterly above reproach, and I would be grateful if at this moment I could honestly pride myself on having always been sensible of this.

"In conclusion, the only one now living who could be said to be in any way still shadowed by undesirable circumstantial evidence in the matter of the death of Marakoff is the woman to whom I have above referred, whom you and I both know, and whom, if there is any chivalry in us, we would make it our duty and honour to protect. In this I feel sure you will agree with me.

"As to the ten thousand pounds owing to the estate of Marakoff, that I shall myself see adjusted.

"There is one other matter concerning a vastly valuable discovery made by my ward shortly before his death, which his sister wishes to give, as he had planned to give it, to England; but in def-

erence to Edward Shackleton's plans and his expectation which this gift might in a measure anticipate I shall withhold the fulfilment of my ward's wishes until a somewhat later day."

When he had finished his letter, Lord Sleugh got up and walked back and forth.

He could sense, almost hear, all about him the alive quietness of the jungle night; could feel, too, almost like a tangible thing, the remoteness of the far long distances that lay now between him and England. How long would it be before his letter could reach Sir Esme!

Then suddenly he thought no more of Sir Esme; he became unaware of the distances. What he saw in his mind's eye was a London drawing-room and Dornia Eleutherios, with the little tiredness about her eyes that made her so doubly beautiful and appealing.

He saw the singing colour of a scarlet Canton shawl on a dove-colour couch, and he sensed again the silence between Dornia and himself, while Hawkins went about noiselessly, drawing the long, heavy curtains at the windows against the night.



Chapter Thirty-three

LIGHT AND SHADOW

IN THE full moonlight, a short distance beyond the baobab tree, lay the body of James Shackleton. Ned Shackleton and his men had found it toward the end of that day, some distance from Marakoff's hut, lying beside a narrow stream. Evidently, distraught and exhausted, he had, in his flight, slipped and fallen. There was on his left temple a slight bruise, not more than that which had been found that sinister day a few months before upon the temple of Marakoff.

Ned Shackleton would permit no one to remain with his brother but himself. Joan had begged him to allow Bartu and Kolak to keep watch during the night, instead; and Lord Sleugh, much moved by all the late tragic events, had added his word. But Shackleton remained firm.

The natives, subdued and frightened by the presence of death, were huddled together like children in their quarters at the other end of the stockade, and were now sleeping.

Joan did not undress, but lay for a long time wakeful in her hut, trying to shut out many things, not daring to let herself dwell upon them, fixing her thought rather on Ned Shackleton, on his quiet strength which was now her whole comfort, and on the bonds, tender and tragic, which bound them so closely together.

She rehearsed a day when, all the sadder things having withdrawn to a distance, she would say to him, "I used to feel sometimes that everything was in a way my fault."

And he would not understand. He would say in that wise, direct way of his,

"Your fault, my beloved? How could it be your fault?"

Then she would tell him, and would watch his face to see the first perplexity, and then the light come into it: "You remember the money that came to you at the last moment and the note

"'From one who is interested in science, and who heard you speak about your work on Tuesday'?"

Well . . . it was I who sent the money and the note."

And he would say, "But you were not at the scientific meeting that day!"

And she would smile and say, "No, but you told me about your work at the Savoy that day that we were at lunch, don't you remember—and that was still Tuesday!"

And he would smile, too, and forgive her the little half-deception, and would say with that deep joy that came into his eyes at times, "You!"

But that would be at a happier time. Now, it seemed to her unendurable to think of him sitting there alone with his own thoughts.

She got up and opened the door of her hut, and stepped out into the perfect stillness of the stockade, and went through the white moonlight to the baobab tree.

He did not see or hear her at first. He was seated on the bench under the tree, his elbows on his knees, and his head bowed in his hands.

When she was within a few feet of him he rose, startled:

"Why are you here, my beloved? I hoped you were sleeping."

"No, I can't sleep," she said. "I want to be with you."

They sat on the low bench under the baobab tree, in its massive pattern of shadow and moonlight, and remained a long time silent.

"What are you thinking of?" he said at last.

"I was thinking just then," she said, "of England and of the garden at Cranbrook."

"My beloved," he said, "I have thought of Cranbrook and England, too; and I have thought that you must go back to them, with Lord Sleugh."

She looked at him, startled. "And you?"

"There is only one thing for me to do. The work I came for is hardly begun. I believe that work can only be completed in the Valley."

For a moment the old horror swept over her—Marakoff—the ape—the Valley—— But she put all this aside.

She took his hand in both of hers. "But you didn't think—you couldn't think I'd go back without you. Dobby must go back alone. I will go to Yoko, as we planned, to the mission, so that Father Hilary may marry us. And together—whenever you choose—we'll go into the Valley."

He held her close.

After a long while she said, softly, "What are you thinking of, my dear?"

"Of him," Shackleton said, simply, "always of him, and of our relation to each other. I can't help blaming myself now for not knowing all that was going on in his mind; the envy and the torment, I mean, and all. I always knew, in a way; I'd always had it to deal with from the time we were boys together."

"But how could you have guessed all that was going on in his mind?"

"If I had been wiser I think I would have known. But you see I was so bent on my work. Strange how we give our time to our busy interests, and to understanding our work and furthering its success, and such a scant amount of time to our human relations; to understanding human beings and making a success of dealing with them."

"That's true," she said, wistfully. "I wish we did understand better."

"Even our words," he went on as though she had not spoken, "the words we use to describe human motives are so wrong and crude, I think. We speak of 'envy' and 'jealousy,' and generally we speak of them with blame or hatred. But it isn't envy and jealousy; it is fear and self-distrust that lie under the motives of the envious and the jealous. . . . Most of them are so gifted, too. He was. Ever so much more gifted than I. But it is as though they have some kind of fatal humility which keeps them from realizing and using their own gifts, so that always they have the desire to feed upon what belongs to others. It is almost as though they were under some enchantment which they haven't the power to break, and most of us are not fine enough or understanding enough to help them break it."

She did not answer, but she was thinking with a kind of startled awareness of how true it all was; of what beauty and gifts had seemed to be locked away in James Shackleton; locked away from his own use of them.

"I don't believe any of us dream either," Shackleton said, dropping his head in his hands again, "what suffering and torment they go through."

Yes, she had thought of that herself. The depth of her own experience with James Shackleton was, she felt, a thing she could never fully share, need never try to share, even with Ned. It was as though James Shackleton, loving her so passionately, and trusting her, had leaned upon her to the extent of allowing her for a little while to share his own bitter torment; had opened to her depths of it that he could not have opened to anyone else; had gained for a little while some peace from that, and for this she felt grateful.

She remembered the turning of his head toward her with that simple beauty and confidence that children have when he had prompted her as to the old song:

One said, "Brother, what shall we eat?"

"I want to go and stand by him a moment," she said, getting up.

Ned Shackleton did not offer to go with her. It was as though, not understanding just why, he nevertheless understood the beauty and the sympathy of her going.

She stood for a few long, still moments looking down at the sensitive face, so white in the moonlight. There was in it the same great delicacy and beauty she had noted when she first saw it, but a beauty sealed now, as it were, by a great remoteness, a profound and withdrawn dignity.

She thought of this; she thought, too, how right it was that it was a night like this, so still and white and friendly, with the added friendliness of the stockade all about them; the natives sleeping at the far end of it, like children; the stockade huts grouped together; the familiar places guarding now, as it were, with a kind of tenderness and reassur-

ance, the man who until now had been so much an alien and stranger to them all.

It seemed to Joan as though James Shackleton had come back, through all his torment, to peace, and quietly at the last . . . and it seemed to Joan, now, blessedly . . . to his own. It seemed to her that, as he lay there in the clear, direct moonlight, he had escaped at last that dread shadow of Marakoff that had fallen so darkly on his life. She felt that now he belonged to them.

It even seemed to her, in the security and finality of these deep and searching moments, that all three of them, Ned and James and herself, had escaped at last from that shadow; and, not guessing the future, she comforted herself with believing it would not now again fall upon them.

She returned to the baobab tree, and to Ned Shackleton.

At the edge of the baobab tree the clear, white space of moonlight; at the edge of that and stretching beyond, tall dark shadows, towering pillars of gigantic trees; darkness and stillness and night . . . an impenetrable wall of mystery . . . the jungle.

THE END

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